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Rota high school, GTC lead vaxx rates at PSS

By JOSHUA SANTOS
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REPORTER

The vaccination rate among all middle and high schools of the CNMI Public School System averages at 80%, with the Dr. Rita H. Inos Jr./

Sr. High School on Rota having the highest vaccination rate of 90%. See ROTA on Page 4

COVID case counts may be losing importance

By CARLA K. JOHNSON
AP MEDICAL WRITER

The explosive increase in U.S. coronavirus case counts is raising alarm, but some experts believe the focus should instead be on COVID-19 hospital admissions. And those aren't climbing as fast.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, for one, said Sunday on ABC that with many infections causing few or no symptoms, "it is much more relevant to focus on the

See COVID on Page 4

With 61 new cases NMI total now at 3,453

By JOSHUA SANTOS
joshua_santos@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A total of 61 new cases of COVID-19 has boosted the CNMI's total number of positive cases to 3,453 since March 2020.

In a news release last Wednesday, the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. said the 61 new cases were confirmed positive from surveil-

» **2,523 recoveries** as of Jan. 4; **11 hospitalized** as of Jan. 5

lance and travel testing on Jan. 4: 15 were found through contact tracing, 40 through community testing, and six

See 61 on Page 4

AT A GLANCE

As of 8:04pm, Jan. 6, 2022

VACCINATIONS IN THE CNMI

Eligible Population **96.1%**
Fully Vaccinated: **96.1%**

Days since last community transmission **2**

Pfizer/BioNTech

Initiated: **36,834**
Fully Vaccinated: **35,222**

Moderna

Initiated: **5,281**
Fully Vaccinated: **5,051**

Janssen

Fully vaccinated: **1,117**

GUAM	OLD	NEW	TOTAL
Positive	20,088	263	20,351
Recovered	19,007	43	19,050
Active	765	263	1,028
Deaths	273	0	273

SAIPAN	OLD	NEW	TOTAL
Positive	3,392	61	3,453
Traced via Travel Screening	333	6	339
Traced via Community Screening	3,059	55	3,114
Deaths	18	0	18

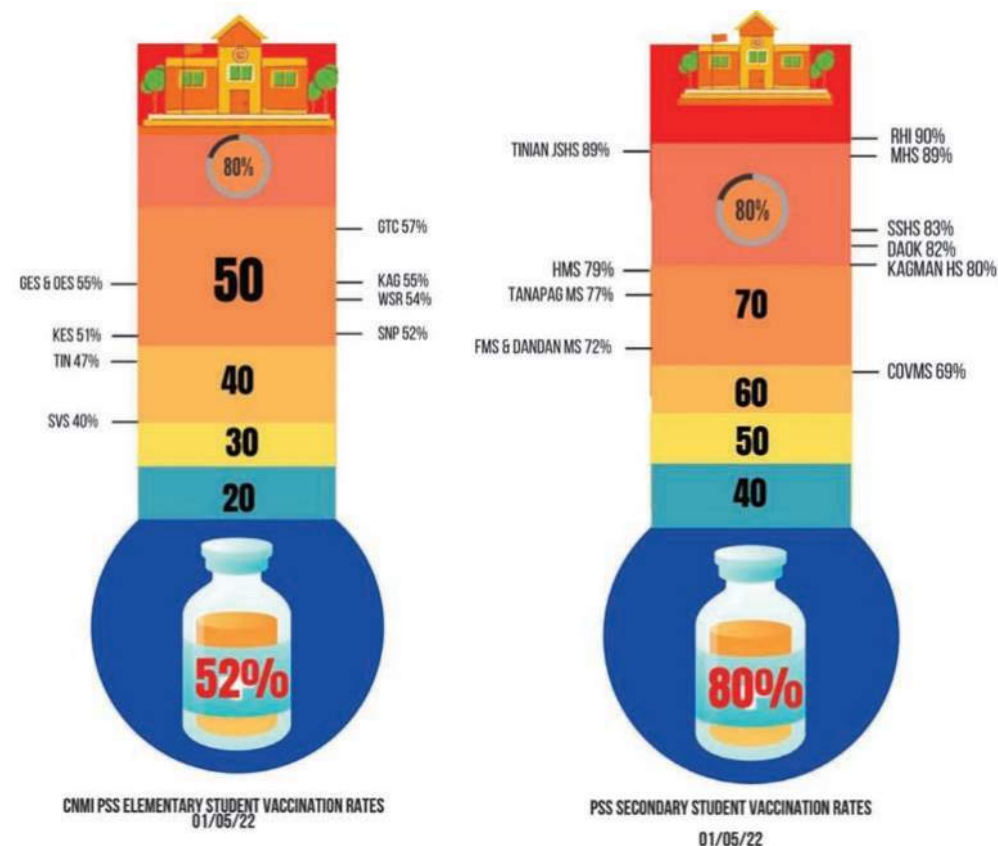
Source: Joint Information Center - Guam, Commonwealth Healthcare Corp., <https://www.vaccinatecnmi.com/vax-dashboard/>

COMMUNITY VULNERABILITY

LEGEND:

- Red: Least safe
- Orange
- Yellow
- Blue
- Green: Safest

Source: Office of the Governor



Left graphic shows the vaccination rates among elementary schools of the Public School System. At right is the graphic for PSS secondary students. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

GCEA shares outlook for 2022

TOGETHER, WE CAN

By JERRY TAN
Special to the Saipan Tribune



This past year saw the continuation of the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic to the CNMI community and economy. The dramatic reduction in tourism arrivals and the constant threat of widespread outbreaks have led to severe impacts on employment, business revenue, and our way of life in the Marianas.

Story on Page 11

CURRENT COVID-19 VACCINATIONS



INSIDE



NATION

Hospitals across the U.S. are feeling the wrath of the omicron and getting thrown into disarray.

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ASIA

North Korea claims to have conducted the second successful test flight of a hypersonic missile.

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LIFE & STYLE

The Duchess of Sussex will receive a nominal 1-pound payment for invasion of privacy plus \ damages.

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GOT A NEWS TIP?

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Local

‘USDOL presents NMI with options to combat joblessness’

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
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REPORTER

Now that the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance has lapsed, the U.S. Department of Labor has presented grant opportunities to the CNMI to help the CNMI workforce get back on its feet, according to the CNMI Department of Labor.

According Labor Secretary Vicky Benavente, even though the CNMI has concluded its PUA program, other grants have been presented to continue the CNMI's workforce development.

“There are other opportunities that are being presented to the CNMI DOL from the U.S. DOL regarding grant opportunities. We’re looking into that to continue with our workforce development [and] training ini-



Gov. Ralph DLG Torres, seated center, poses with Labor Secretary Vicky Benavente, seated second from right, and other employees of the CNMI Department of Labor during a visit to the office yesterday, during which Torres thanked them for their work throughout the past two years of this pandemic.

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

tiatives because that’s what we’re here for—to help people get back on their feet and

get jobs,” she said.

Benavente said the U.S. DOL is aware of the CNMI’s

unique and challenging situation since its main economic driver is tourism.

“I have informed our U.S. DOL partners that the situation in the CNMI is still

quite difficult, quite challenging, and quite dire, in light of more cancellations coming about from our major economic driver, which is tourism, so U.S. DOL is aware of what we are facing,” she said.

In response, U.S. DOL and CNMI DOL are in discussion about several possible grants that could possibly provide benefits for those who still remain jobless or remain on reduced hours because of the ongoing pandemic.

“I can’t promise that they have indicated that there will be another program like PUA, but we’re in discussion about another opportunity like grants that will hopefully continue to next year,” she said.

Benavente noted that it is believed that there are thousands who are still jobless because businesses, especially businesses that run off of tourists, are still closed or are not operating at 100% capacity.

“Fairly regularly, we are looking at a few thousand still unemployed or many more thousands still on reduced hours [because] businesses have not gone back to 100% The trend, based on unemployment claims, looks like we’re still at a steady pace of unemployment. We haven’t increased, but we haven’t decreased either. Its staying at about 300 claimants per week. They’re coming in to file the last months of PUA,” Benavente said.

Meanwhile, according to a recent update on PUA, a little over 300 initial claimants are still waiting for unemployment assistance and about \$266 million of the \$700 million allocated to the CNMI for PUA and FPUC has been disbursed.

Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune

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Man found guilty of taking 2 cases of beer from supermarket

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**
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REPORTER

After a bench trial that lasted six days, the Superior Court found a man guilty of theft for stealing two cases of beer from Twin Supermarket because he and his companions ran out of beer during a drinking session.

Superior Court Associate Judge Joseph Camacho found habitual offender Vicente Sablan Basa, 69, guilty of theft in the case where he was caught on camera taking two cases of beers from Twins Supermarket back in March 2021.

Although the court has yet to sentence Basa in this case, Basa was still remanded to Department of Corrections to serve a 20-day sentence after the court revoked his previous probation.

According to Camacho, the court found all the government witnesses credible and determined that, on March 27, 2021, after drinking with friends and then running out of beer, Basa did go to the Twins Supermarket in Dandan with-

out any money with the intent to take the beers without paying for them.

Witnesses determined that Basa entered Twins Supermarket, took two cases of beer and walked out of the store without paying for it.

Basa was caught on video taking the beer, leaving the store without paying for it but was chased by the store supervisor. Basa then lied and said he already paid for the beer, and quickly threw the cases of beer into the car and got into the car.

The court made a reasonable inference based on the video of the store parking lot—that Basa already knew he did not have any money; the driver of the car, Felix Castro, did not park the car in the normal fashion but rather, waited with the engine on and facing the car in such a way as to make a quick getaway.

The court also found that Basa had already opened and consumed a portion of a beer can when their vehicle was stopped a few minutes later in Finasisu.

Basa also admitted to taking the beer and he did not have any money on hand, even asking the police officer if they could take him home to get some money to pay for the beer.

"The court finds that at the time that Basa took the beer he had no intention of pay for it. By taking the cases out of the store without payment, and further opening a can of beer and consuming it, Basa permanently deprived the owner Twins Supermarket of its property," Camacho said.

At the time when Basa took the beer, he was on probation related to another criminal case and was ordered to obey all the CNMI and federal laws, and not to possess or consume any alcohol beverages.

The bench trial was done on Aug. 4 to 5, 2021 and then Oct. 6, Oct. 27, Oct. 29, before finally concluding on Jan. 5, 2022.

The government was represented by assistant attorney general Heather Barcinas while Basa was represented by assistant public defender Vina Seelam.

'Close to \$25M in local stimulus already expended'

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
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REPORTER

Finance Secretary David DLG Atalig has disclosed that they have already expended close to \$25 million on local stimulus, which was their original projection of how much it was going to cost such a program.



Atalig

Also, the last major catch of stimulus cards comprises 868 in all and that most of the cards have already arrived, he said at a press briefing last week. Finance expects that a couple of hundred more stimulus cards should have arrived last weekend.

Atalig said they would be releasing those cards in the mail and people will get their local stimulus that they have been waiting for.

Atalig said they have been working on this last big batch of cards every week to get

those that had issues with their tax returns fixed and trying to clear errors or any clarifications needed.

He said they will see who have not received any as they close out the local stimulus and do a final closeout report but he believes that they have taken care of everyone, since they have already expended close to \$25 million.

"There may be some few people that have still not received it. I urge them to continue to contact the Division of Revenue and Taxation to clarify those and so we can get them their local stimulus," Atalig said.

Finance earlier stated that they expect to release \$25 million in all for 28,000 local stimulus cards using American Rescue Plan Act money. Eligible individuals received \$500 per stimulus card and \$500 for each dependent.

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43 to graduate DFEMS 14th Cycle Fire Academy today

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The 14th Cycle of the Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services is set to see off 43 new firefighters today.

Following the final stage of the fire academy—evaluation—that concluded this week, 43 cadets will gain the title of firefighter today after the graduation ceremony that will be held at the Kensington Resort Saipan.

According to a previous article on the *Saipan Tribune*, there were initially 52 cadets at the beginning of the academy. However, only 43 completed the first phase and successfully entered the second. Of the 43 cadets, seven were from Rota, six from Tinian, and 30 from the CNMI.

The first phase of the academy, also known as the Red phase, consisted of intense physical fitness

training, discipline, and the ethics of being a cadet and being a firefighter. The cadets have now completed the academic phase and the hands-on and evaluation stage.

DFEMS launched the emergency Fire Academy earlier this year to make up for the loss of the nine firefighters who were terminated for refusing to get vaccinated. The department was left with only 114 personnel at that time.

Initially, the target date for the start of the academy was sometime around June, but that had to be pushed back. The academy officially began on July 19.

A total of 23 individuals initially signed a petition against the mandatory vaccination. However, a number of these individual eventually had themselves vaccinated and only nine were eventually terminated. Those nine individuals filed a lawsuit against the department and its com-

missioner, Dennis Mendiola.

Last September, Superior Court Associate Judge Joseph Camacho granted the agreement between the nine firefighters, DFEMS, and Mendiola to dismiss the case without prejudice. That means the plaintiffs can re-file their suit with the court if they choose.

Prior to that, on Sept. 13, the court issued an order denying the preliminary injunction to reinstate the terminated firefighters.

The court denied the plaintiff's motion on three grounds: they failed to exhaust their administrative remedies, the preliminary injunction was not a proper remedy for economic harm, and the plaintiffs did not have a strong likelihood of success on the merits for any of their claims, the level of threat of irreparable harm was not present, and the public's interest in protecting health outweighed the interest of plaintiffs.

ROTA

From Page 1

Among PSS elementary schools, the vaccination rate is currently at 52%, with the Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School having the highest vaccination rate of 57%.

These, among a host of other information, were unveiled yesterday, with PSS publishing the vaccination rates of its schools as of Jan. 5, covering all PSS elementary, middle, and high school students. Graphics displaying the schools and their vaccination rates can be found on PSS' social media pages.

At 57%, the GTC Elementary School's vaccination rate was top of the heap among elementary schools as of Jan. 5, followed by Garapan Elementary School, Oleai Elementary School, and Kagman Elementary School, which each have 55% of their eligible students vaccinated.

William S. Reyes Elementary School is at 54%, Sinapalo Elementary School is at 52%, Koblerville Elementary School is at 51%, and Tinian Elementary School is at 47%. At 40% is San Vicente Elementary School.

Currently, all CNMI PSS elementary schools have been open for full in-person classes since Jan. 3. On Mondays, elementary schools are open from 7:30am to 11:30am. From Tuesday to Friday, elementary schools are open from 7:30am to 2pm.

For middle schools and high schools, Dr. Rita H. Inos Jr./Sr. High School's 90% vaccination rate puts it ahead of the pack. Close behind at 89% vaccinated is Tinian Jr./Sr.

High School in Tinian and Marianas High School.

Saipan Southern High School is at 83%, Da'Ok Academy at 82%, and Kagman High School at 80%. Hopwood Middle School is at 79%, Tanapag Middle School is at 77%, and Francisco M. Sablan Middle School and Dandan Middle School are at 72%. And at 69% is Chacha Oceanview Middle School.

Currently, all PSS high schools have been open for full in-person classes since Jan. 3. On Mondays, high schools are open from 8:30am to 12:30pm. From Tuesday to Friday, high schools are open from 8:30am to 3:15pm.

Currently, middle schools are on cohort schedules until Jan. 10.

During a CNMI Board of Education meeting last Dec. 28, Education Commissioner Dr. Alfred B. Ada explained that the decision to open PSS middle schools for full in-person classes was due to scheduling overlaps with the Jan. 3 reopening date and some middle schools' vaccination schedules.

Ada explained to the board that he had met with middle school principal representative Martha Kintol, who expressed to him the need for middle schools to continue on with cohorts until Jan. 10 to clear out any overlap between the return to full in-person classes and some schools' vaccination schedules.

Ada told the BOE that one middle school's scheduled date to administer second doses of COVID-19 vaccines through school-based vaccinations was set for Jan. 5.

Come Jan. 10, the scheduling overlaps should be resolved, and middle schools will reopen for full in-person classes.

COVID

From Page 1

hospitalizations as opposed to the total number of cases." Other experts argue that case counts still have value.

As the super-contagious omicron variant rages across the U.S., new COVID-19 cases per day have more than tripled over the past two weeks, reaching a record-shattering average of 480,000. Schools, hospitals and airlines are struggling as infected workers go into isolation.

Meanwhile, hospital admissions averaged 14,800 per day last week, up 63% from the week before, but still short of the peak of 16,500 per day a year ago, when the vast majority of the U.S. was unvaccinated. Deaths have been stable over the past two weeks at an average of about 1,200 per day, well below the all-time high of 3,400 last January.

Public health experts suspect that those numbers, taken together, reflect the vaccine's continued effectiveness at preventing serious illness, even against omicron, as well as the possibility that the variant does not make most people as sick as earlier versions.

Omicron accounted for 95% of new coronavirus infections in the U.S. last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Tuesday, in another indication of how astonishingly fast the variant has spread since it was first detected in South Africa in late November.

Dr. Wafaa El-Sadr, director of ICAP, a global health center at Columbia University, said the case count does not appear to be the most important number now.

Instead, she said, the U.S. at this stage of the pandemic should be "shifting our focus, especially in an era of vaccination, to really focus on preventing illness, disability and death, and therefore counting those."

Daily case counts and their ups

and downs have been one of the most closely watched barometers during the outbreak and have been a reliable early warning sign of severe disease and death in previous coronavirus waves.

But they have long been considered an imperfect measure, in part because they consist primarily of laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19, not the actual number of infections out there, which is almost certainly many times higher.

The daily case counts are also subject to wild swings. The number of new cases recorded on Monday topped an unprecedented 1 million, a figure that may reflect cases that had been held up by reporting delays over the holiday weekend. The seven-day rolling average is considered more reliable.

Now, the value of the daily case count is being called into question as never before.

For one thing, the skyrocketing increase reflects, at least in part, an omicron-induced stampede among many Americans to get tested before holiday gatherings, and new testing requirements at workplaces and at restaurants, theaters and other sites.

Also, the true number of infections is probably much higher than the case count because the results of the at-home tests that Americans are rushing to use are not added to the official tally, and because long waits have discouraged some people from lining up to get swabbed.

But also, case numbers seem to yield a less useful picture of the pandemic amid the spread of omicron, which is causing lots of infections but so far does not appear to be as severe in its effects.

Case counts have lost relevance, said Andrew Noymer, a public health professor at the University of California, Irvine.

"Hospitalizations are where the rubber meets the road," Noymer said. "It's a more objective measure." He added: "If I had to choose one metric, I would choose

the hospitalization data."

Even hospital numbers aren't a perfect reflection of disease severity because they include patients admitted for other health problems who happen to test positive for the coronavirus.

Keeping track of COVID-19 admissions can tell doctors something about the seriousness of the virus and also the capacity of hospitals to deal with the crisis. That, in turn, can help health leaders determine where to shift equipment and other resources.

Still, health experts are not prepared to do away with case counts.

"We should not abandon looking at case numbers," said Dr. Eric Topol, head of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, "but it is important to acknowledge we're seeing only a portion of the actual number of cases."

Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle, said that for each new infection detected, the U.S. is missing two cases. But he said tracking the number of positive test results is still important as omicron makes its way across the land.

Case numbers can point to future hot spots and indicate whether a wave of infection has peaked, Mokdad said.

Also, case counts will continue to be important to people who are vulnerable because of age or health reasons and need a sense of the virus' spread in their communities so they can make decisions about precautions, he said. Hospitals, schools and businesses need to plan for absences.

"To give up on knowing if cases are going up or down, it's flying blind. How can we as a country not know the epidemic curve for infection?" Mokdad said.

If testing has lost its relevance, he said, it is because the U.S. never developed a way to consistently and reliably monitor infections.

"It's not acceptable to cover failure by changing the rules," he said.

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From Page 1

through travel testing. CHCC said these new cases have been isolated and are being actively monitored.

CHCC reported that as of Jan. 4, there have been 2,523 recoveries and 624 active cases since Oct. 28.

CHCC also reported that as of Jan. 5 there were 11 individuals hospitalized as a result of COVID-19. Of the 11, six are unvaccinated and five vaccinated. Two of the 11 are on a ventilator, and two individuals have been discharged.

If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, CHCC asks you to seek care or get tested for COVID-19 early, as you may be eligible to receive monoclonal antibody treatment or other treatments given soon after COVID-19 infection.

For COVID-19 vaccination efforts, CHCC reported that 225 COVID-19 vaccine shots were administered on Jan. 5, bringing the CNMI's vaccination rate to 95.9%. Registering to receive a vaccine can be done through www.vaccinatecnmi.com.

For COVID-19 testing efforts, CHCC reported that 471 COVID-19 tests were conducted on Jan. 4. The testing numbers comprise surveil-

lance and travel testing, but does not include numbers from the Department of Fire & Emergency Medical Services' antigen testing, said CHCC. Registering to be tested for COVID-19 can be done through <https://covidtesting.chcc.health>.

For those wishing to learn more about how to protect you and your families safe from COVID-19, CHCC asks the community to visit <https://www.staysafecnmi.com/livecovidSAFE/>. The website has links to a COVID-19 guidebook, a "10 things" graphic depicting at-home COVID-19 symptom management methods, up-to-date CNMI entry and quarantine protocols, additional information sources, and contact information for those with more questions/concerns.

If you have concerns regarding possible exposure to a positive case, CHCC asks you to call its contact tracers at 670-285-1942, 670-286-1710, or 670-286-1711.

If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, which include fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, and new loss of taste or smell, CHCC asks you to see your healthcare provider or call the CHCC Tele-Triage hotline at 670-233-2067.

Navy awards \$38.7M Japan-funded police station in Guam

JOINTBASE PEARLHARBOR-HICKAM—Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific awarded yesterday a \$38.7 million task order to APTIM Construction JV, LLC of Baton Rouge, La. for the construction of a police station at Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz.

The contract supports the Defense Policy Review Initiative and is funded by the Government of Japan as part of the international agreement between the United States and Japan.

“A completed and functioning police station is central to the operations of the new Marine Corps base,” said Will Boudra, NAVFAC Pacific Guam Program Management Office director. “This project is another recognition of GOJ’s significant partnership and contribution made towards building the new MCBCB. Camp Blaz will truly be a 21st century military installation.”

The 20,000 square foot police station includes space for operations, training, services

and the criminal investigation division. The police station will include administrative and waiting areas, customer service and report writing areas, interrogation rooms with adjacent viewing rooms and evidence vaults. Dispatch centers for medical, fire and security, along with training areas to include classrooms and simulators, armory, pass and identification services, package inspection, communication equipment storage, general supply, and break lounges will also be a part of the police station.

“This project is critical for the buildup of MCBCB, so it was essential to have stakeholder involvement throughout the design process,” said Brenton Endo, NAVFAC Pacific Design and Construction project manager. “We look forward to continuing these efforts with the GOJ, as we move forward with the construction phase.”

Work will be performed in Guam with an expected completion date of March 2024. (PR)



Artist rendition shows the exterior view of the police station at Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz on Guam.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

DeLeon Guerrero files OGA request for latest info on ARPA expenditure plan

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
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REPORTER

Sen. Edith E. DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan) filed yesterday an Open Government Act request with Finance Secretary David DLG. Atalig to obtain the latest information about the CNMI’s expenditure plan for the money it got from the American Rescue Plan Act.

DeLeon Guerrero, who chairs the Saipan and Northern Islands Delegation’s Judiciary and Governmental Operations Committee, listed seven questions in her OGA request, including how much is the ARPA allocation for non-government organizations/non-profit organizations. Of this amount, how much is allocated for fiscal year 2021 and fiscal year 2022, and how much has been awarded for each fiscal year.

In response to *Saipan Tribune’s* inquiry why she asked for such information, DeLeon Guerrero said it is important to know to date if there had been any changes to the CNMI’s approved expenditure plan that Atalig first presented last June 4, 2021.

She said her office also receives inquiries on funding opportunities and that knowing and having that informa-

tion will help in their response.

Third, the senator said, proper referral for individual services to NGOs/NPOs is important, especially if they are recipients of ARPA funds.

Finally, DeLeon Guerrero said, generating income on top of initial funding sources is a good thing but it is just as important to know where these generated income, if any, is being expended on.

The senator also requested information for the following:

■ Listing of awardees, amount of award, and approved purpose of the award.

■ Are/where these funds (ARPA for NGOs/NPO) deposited in interest bearing accounts before disbursements to awardees?

■ Which financial institutions were these funds (ARPA for NGOs/NPOs) deposited with and at what interest rate and amount of income generated since investment in interest bearing account(s)?

■ Were the income generated from interest bearing account(s) for these funds (ARPA for NGOs/NPOs) used for other purposes other than ARPA approved projects?

If so, provide a detail list of expenditures funded by this income generation, of otherwise, please do explain.



DeLeon Guerrero

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NMTech on schedule with Kobler construction project

By JOSHUA SANTOS
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REPORTER

A construction project with the end goal being a Northern Marianas Technical Institute facility in Koblerville is “right on schedule,” according to NMTech chief executive officer Jodina Attao during an NMTech board of trustees meeting yesterday.

In her “CEO’s Report” as part of yesterday’s board meeting, Attao shared with the trustees that topographic site surveying was completed on Nov. 28, 2021, and that requests for proposals have been regularly advertised and

published in the CNMI’s print news publications. The RFPs were first advertised on Dec. 14, 2021, and will continue to be published once a week until Jan. 14, 2022.

Attao reported that nine vendors have expressed an interest in submitting proposals, and that a pre-proposal meeting with the vendors took place on Dec. 28, 2021. Of the nine who showed interest, four vendors attended, said Attao.

She said the deadline to submit a proposal is Jan. 18, 2022. The next steps for NMTech will be to begin talks on architecture and engineering of the

facility itself.

Attao shared with the board that NMTech instructor Rip Stephenson, who has 35 years of construction experience, is NMTech’s in-house project coordinator, and that Stephenson is in close contact with other NMTech instructors to determine what classroom accommodations will be needed at the Koblerville site.

“Mr. Rip [Stephenson] is working closely with all the instructors to make sure that each classroom is equipped [with] what they need and integrating

the instructional spaces with the workshop spaces rather than having to walk across the campus to get from one [space] to another,” said Attao.

One idea is to keep NMTech’s culinary program based at the school’s Lower Base facility and relocate some of the school’s other programs to the Koblerville facility. Attao said the new additional space would allow NMTech to expand and improve its culinary instructional areas.

Attao shared with the board that an expansive kitchen area

is a benchmark for most culinary accreditations, and told *Saipan Tribune* separately that NMTech is working on accrediting its culinary program.

The proposed Koblerville facility will be a 30,000-square-foot two-story building that will feature spaces for administrative offices, classrooms, and open areas for the hands-on portions of NMTI’s trades programs. The project is funded through the \$10.3 million grant the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration gave NMTech in February 2021.

Manglona to Torres: Use ARPA money to open more COVID testing centers

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

With the recent increase in the number of positive cases on Saipan, Sen. Paul A. Manglona (Ind-Rota) believes this underscores the need to assist the COVID-19 Task Force with American Rescue Plan Act money so it could open more testing centers with expanded days and hours.

In a letter to Gov. Ralph DLG Torres last Wednesday, Manglona said there should be more testing centers so that individuals who are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or who are potentially exposed to positively-tested individuals can be tested immediately.

Despite the COVID-19 Task Force’s or the CNMI’s best efforts, Manglona believes that people will continue to see an increase in confirmed positive cases, hospitalizations, and deaths if there is no adequate testing capabilities to maximize prevention measures.

The senator noted that the CNMI’s death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic rose from 14 last Jan. 1, 2022, to 18 in a matter of just two days. He said there have been 3,101 new cases since Oct. 28, 2021.

Consequently, Manglona said, he believes testing should be widely available and immediately escalated to promptly test as many individuals that may have come

into contact with a positively-tested individual.

“This is the only way we will know how many asymptomatic carriers there are in our islands,” the senator said.

Manglona said they hear of occurrences when individuals on the contact tracing list have to wait for as long as four days for a task force personnel to come to their homes to test “persons under investigation” and even cases when individuals who are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms have to wait three to four days before they are tested.

A longer version of this story is available at www.saipantribune.com

COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM
P.O. BOX 501370
SAIPAN, MP 96950

PUBLIC NOTICE

Pursuant to 1 CMC § 9910(a), the Seventeenth CNMI State Board of Education hereby gives notice that there will be a Regular Board Meeting on Tuesday, January 11, 2022 at 1:00 p.m. via zoom. Please see the link below.

AGENDA¹

I. Preliminary

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Adoption of Agenda
4. Election of Officers
5. Adoption of Minutes
 - a. May 21, 2021 Special Board Meeting Draft Minutes
 - b. July 8, 2021 Regular Board Meeting Draft Minutes
 - c. August 6, 2021 Special Board Meeting Draft Minutes
 - d. September 1, 2021 Special Board Meeting Draft Minutes
 - e. September 30, 2021 Regular Board Meeting Draft Minutes

II. Public Comments²

III. Unfinished Business

IV. New Business

1. Update on School Opening
2. Update on Waiver for Face to Face

V. Executive Session³

1. Legal Updates
2. Personnel
3. Other matters

VI. Discussion of Agenda for next Board meeting

VII. Adjournment

*<https://zoom.us/j/99476024902?pwd=bmw4TGhtdWJXUIN-Ba3ZKdDhNRldQdz09>
Meeting ID: 994 7602 4902 Passcode: 040496

¹ In the event that the items on the agenda are not completed, the meeting will recess and reconvene on the following day or at the most expeditious date and time determined by the Board.

² Pursuant to BOE Policy 0415, public comments are limited to 30 minutes. We ask that remarks be limited to 3 minutes each. Everyone is welcomed to submit written comments.

³ Pursuant to 1 CMC § 9912, the Board may vote to meet in executive session at any time.



ANNOUNCEMENT and PUBLIC NOTICE

(This Notice is paid by NMHC with HUD funds)

The Northern Marianas Housing Corporation (NMHC) announces the availability of a limited number of Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs) awarded through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

Who is Eligible?

To be eligible for an EHV, an individual or family must meet one of four eligibility categories:

1. Experiencing homelessness;
2. At-risk of homelessness;
3. Fleeing, or attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking; OR
4. Were recently homeless and for whom providing rental assistance will prevent the family's homelessness or having high risk of housing instability.

How do I get an EHV?

The CNMI Homeless Prevention Coalition will refer eligible families to NMHC for EHVs. If you are experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness, or experiencing any of the conditions listed above, please call any one of the following organizations to schedule an appointment to complete an assessment. NMHC will only receive applications through a direct referral process from the CNMI Homeless Prevention Coalition. Applications will NOT be accepted at NMHC.

**Division of Youth Services (DYS)
& Office of Youth Affairs**
Office hours: 8 am to 4 pm
(Mon—Fri. except holidays)

Saipan: (670) 237-1017/1018 or (670) 664-2599 or (670) 285-1921

Tinian: (670) 433-9272
Rota: (670) 532-9393

Applications for appt. may be downloaded at:
dcca.gov.mp or dys.gov.mp and dropped-off at:
Kagman Community Center, Tanapag Youth Center,
Tinian DYS Office, or Sinapalo Youth Center

Micronesian Legal Services Corp. (MLSC)
Office hours: 9 am to 12 pm
And 1 pm to 3 pm

Saipan: (670) 234-7729 or (670) 234-6243
Tinian: (670) 433-2664
Rota: (670) 284-0681 or (670) 532-0003/0004

**Northern Marianas Coalition
Against Domestic & Sexual Violence (NMCADSV)**
Office hours: 9 am to 5 pm
(Mon—Fri. except holidays)

Saipan: (670) 234-3878

**All partnering agencies will begin accepting calls for appointment on January 10th, 2022.
Due to the pandemic, face-to-face will be allowed by appointment only.**

For definitions of the four eligibility categories, please visit the NMHC website at: nmhcgov.net

EHV is a form of tenant-based rental assistance similar to the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program. EHV is limited to the eligible population. Certification of eligibility is required. EHV referrals are managed through a direct referral process from the CNMI Homeless Prevention Coalition. Please contact one of the agencies listed above for direct referrals to the Northern Marianas Housing Corporation EHV Program.



**A special thanks to the collaborative agencies involved in this program.
“NMHC is an equal employment and fair housing public agency”**

ARPA money allotted for non-profits, small biz

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Ten million dollars in American Rescue Plan Act funding has been set aside for non-profit organizations, while \$20 million in ARPA money has been allocated to assist small businesses, according to Finance Secretary David DLG Atalig last week.

Speaking at a press briefing, Atalig said they will be awarding these ARPA money in the next couple of weeks.

He said that under Section 602A in ARPA funding, they have set aside about \$10 million for non-profit organizations so these organizations shall submit their request for financial assistance to the governor's office. Atalig said he asked non-profit organizations to give him copy of their request so that he is aware which groups are seeking ARPA financial assistance.

Atalig said most of those non-profit organizations have requested in some form or another for help on meeting their payroll, as well as helping their volunteers or employees continue to work so that they can continue with their programs and services. "And we support that," he said, adding that they have already received about 10 to 12 non-profit applications.

Atalig said they're just about to award non-profit organizations with assistance in the next couple of weeks.

For private contractors that have been load-
ing equipment or other items related to the fight against the pandemic at the seaports or airports, Atalig said they have allocations in ARPA as well—both what is given to the territory and what is in the overall ARPA law.

Atalig said these contractors from private businesses have opportunities to apply for very low, if not almost zero, interest rates for financial assistance using ARPA funds. He said they have allocated about \$20 million to help small businesses that want to apply.

"Of course, they have salary, premium pay requests that will be the avenue for them to seek," the secretary said.

Atalig said they will be rolling out a program in the next couple of weeks as well, helping small businesses boost their businesses with some financial aid from ARPA.

He said the Commonwealth Economic Development Authority, formerly the Commonwealth Development Authority, also has funds available to assist small businesses.

The secretary said the Marianas Public Land Trust is also helping out small businesses.

"If it's giving their people premium pay or helping them comply with any business and regulatory requirements, whether it's having plexiglass or helping them with social distances requirements, there's funding to help them," he said.

As to the question if there is funding that would go to the workers and not just to the company owners' pocket, Atalig said companies have to submit their spending plan—their application and justify their requested amount, and what they're going to do with it. He said companies are going to be held accountable for what they have requested. Atalig said if the companies requested for premium pay, they are requirements for them to comply. In essence this is a subrecipient grant and businesses are going to have some requirements that they'll need to comply with, or else they'll be required to return those funds.

"That needs to be related to COVID and what are they doing to mitigate and provide their services to help the community through these trying times," he added.

» **Awarding of financial assistance in next couple of weeks**



Commonwealth Utilities Corporation



INVITATION FOR BIDS CUC-IFB-22-009

PAU PAU BEACH 2-INCH WATERLINE EXTENSION PROJECT

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the Pau Pau Beach 2-Inch Waterline Extension, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The project consists, in general installation of a new main waterline and lateral service line; connection to the existing waterline; installation of gate valve assembly, PRV and PSV, flush hydrants, air release valves, fire hydrant assembly; existing lateral service tap relocation; restoration of existing asphalt concrete road; and other related work. The work shall be done in accordance with the Project Plans and Specifications and without disruption to the daily operation of the water system.

This project is funded by a grant from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

CUC requires the Project to be completed in **180 calendar days** from date of award of contract.

Prospective Bidders for this IFB must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of \$200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by a Site Visit is scheduled on **January 13, 2022 at 10:00 AM (ChST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) hard copies must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked **"CUC-IFB-22-009, Pau Pau Beach 2-Inch Waterline Extension Project"** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on February 2, 2022**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered. Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement the form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

A Bid Guarantee of fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The bid guarantee may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidders. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.

All bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

All questions or request for clarification regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on January 17, 2022** to Mr. Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email – manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Mr. Joel H. Puyat, CUC Water/Wastewater Engineer – via email joel.puyat@cucgov.org and Mrs. Marcela Tenorio Procurement & Supply, Senior Administrative Assistant – via email marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal in the best interest of the government. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

GARY P. CAMACHO
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator



Commonwealth Utilities Corporation



INVITATION FOR BIDS CUC-IFB-22-001

KOBLERVILLE SEWERLINE EXTENSION PROJECT

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the Koblerville Sewerline Extension Project in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The project consists of the installation of gravity sewer main, new service laterals, connection to existing service laterals, and the installation of sewer manholes.

The project is funded by a grant from the United States of Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and CUC. The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA.

CUC requires the project to be completed in **300 calendar days** from date of award of contract.

Prospective Bidders for this IFB must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The IFB package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of \$200.00 for one IFB package set.

One (1) original and Five (5) copies of the bid MUST be submitted in a sealed envelope marked **"CUC-IFB-22-001, Koblerville Sewer Line Extension Project"** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on January 11, 2022**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Bids mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before due date and time or post-marked before due date and time. Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement this form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

A Bid Guarantee of *fifteen percent (15%)* of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The bid guarantee may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. A Performance Bond of *one hundred percent (100%)* of the total proposal price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidders. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or otherwise secured in a manner satisfactory to CUC. A Payment Bond of *one hundred percent (100%)* of the total proposal price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidders. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or otherwise secured in a manner satisfactory to CUC, for the protection of all persons supplying labor and material to the contractor or its subcontractors for the performance of the work provided for in the contract.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification should be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). **Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.**

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract. Bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

This Invitation for Bids does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of bids in anticipation of a contract. The award of a contract may be contingent upon the Commonwealth Public Utilities Commission's (CPUC) approval. If CPUC approval is required, the contract will not be executed by CUC until such approval is provided. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations. The contractor shall be required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered bidders and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on December 30, 2021** to Mr. Manny B. Sablan, Jr., CUC's Procurement & Supply, Purchasing Administrator, via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org, with a copy to Larry Manacop, Acting Chief Engineer for Water/Wastewater via email at larry.manacop@cucgov.org, Joel Puyat, Engineer via email at joel.puyat@cucgov.org and Ms. Christie L. Sablan, Procurement & Supply, Senior, Administrative Technician via email address at christie.sablan@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids for any reason and waive any defects in said bid proposal, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

GARY P. CAMACHO
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator



Commonwealth Utilities Corporation



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS CUC-RFP-22-005

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES FOR LOWER BASE SEWER REPLACEMENT – PHASE II

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting a fee proposal from a professional archaeologist who meets the U.S. Department of Interior qualifications (36CFR61) to create a work plan to prepare information, data and documentation needed to conduct archaeological monitoring during construction of all areas identified by the CNMI HPO for the construction of a new sewer line on Rte. 314 – Lower Base Drive and Rte. 30 – Chalan Pale Arnold Road in Lower Base, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

This project is funded through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). Award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval of the USEPA.

The scope of Archaeological Services will include, but not be limited to:

1. Conduct background research to document the environmental and land-use histories of the project site.
2. Prepare a monitoring plan to the specifications of the Scope of Work and the guidelines for research designs.
3. Implement the monitoring plan activities following the approved plan.
4. Prepare an End of Fieldwork Letter that provides a general description of the project, work completed, burials recovered, sites and features identified.
5. Prepare a draft report summarizing the monitoring and data recovery activities & within six months of completing the fieldwork.
6. Prepare and submit, based on review comments, two final hard copies and one CD-ROM copy of the archaeological report to the HPO.
7. Prepare and submit revised CNMI Site Forms for previously recorded sites, as needed, and new site forms for all newly documented sites.
8. Submit all artifacts collected and pay all fees according to the Commonwealth Museum of History and Culture (CMHC) to the specifications of the current draft curation standards.

The RFP package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of \$100.00 for one RFP package set.

One (1) original and five (5) hard copies of the PROPOSAL must be submitted in a SEALED ENVELOPE marked **"CUC-RFP-22-005: Archaeological Services for Lower Base Sewer Replacement – Phase II"** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **January 27, 2022, at 10:00 AM (ChST)**. Late submissions and conditional proposals will not be considered.

Discussions may be conducted with responsible proposers who submit proposal determined to be reasonably susceptible of being selected for award for the purpose of clarification and to ensure full understanding of and responsiveness to solicitation requirements. All proposers shall be accorded fair and equal treatment with respect to any opportunity for discussion. During discussions, there will be no disclosure of any information derived from the proposal submitted by competing proposers.

All proposers are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the proposer due to lack of information or understanding of the RFP requirements in the course of proposer's preparation of the RFP under the contract. The RFP does not commit CUC to award a contract, to pay any cost incurred in the preparation of the RFP under this request, or to procure or contract for services. Proposers are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This RFP and the ensuing contract shall be executed as per the CUC Procurement Regulations.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered prospective proposers and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on January 12, 2022** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copies to Nicolette Villagomez, Water/Wastewater Engineer, via email address nicolette.villagomez@cucgov.org and Christie Sablan, CUC Senior Administrative Technician via email address christie.sablan@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals for any reason and to waive any defects in said RFP, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All proposals shall become the property of CUC.

GARY P. CAMACHO
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

Navy restores, reopens Tinian’s Chiget Beach for public use




U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Joint Region Marianas, and CNMI leadership led by Gov. Ralph DLG Torres hold their scissors at the ready during the Chiget Beach Ribbon Cutting Ceremony on Tinian last Dec. 22, 2021. Chiget Beach was officially reopened for public use. U.S. NAVY/SHAINA O'NEAL


ASAN, Guam—U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Joint Region Marianas, and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands leadership gathered for a ribbon cutting ceremony at Chiget Beach on Tinian last Dec. 22. The event commemorated the official reopening of Chiget Beach for public use. The beach and its surrounding areas were part of a battleground during

World War II and subsequently became the Tinian Mortar Range, which was used as a military training facility until 1994. Access

to the beach was restricted due to the potential hazard from unexploded ordnance. Site surveys and studies were conducted in 2017 to determine if any environmental or munition hazards were present in the Chiget beach area, access path from the main road, and within the shallow water embayment. No environmental hazards were detected during these extensive surveys and the only munitions debris discovered were from small arms. A total of 350 lbs of metallic debris was removed from the area. Following the site surveys and cleanup efforts, Chiget Beach was deemed safe for public recreational use. Rear Adm. Benjamin Nicholson, the Joint Region Marianas commander, thanked CNMI leadership and government partners for the collaborative efforts that led to the reopening of the beach. “I think it’s a perfect example of how much we have grown our partnership over the years, and the incredible feats we can accomplish when we work together,” he said. “I look forward to a continued working relationship with the CNMI government, [CNMI Bureau of Military Affairs], [Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality], and the Tinian Mayor’s Office to ensure public safety and the complete the investigation of the entire mortar range.” CNMI Gov. Ralph DLG Torres expressed his appreciation to the U.S. Department of Defense for their partnership. “The reopening of Chiget Beach for public access is a hallmark of the progress we have made through the strong partnership we have with DoD,” he said. “The long road we have taken to make it here has been filled with individuals of exemplary character in seeing the long-promised cleanup of Chiget a reality and I thank our DoD partners for their commitment to completing this project. Our islands provide the nations with the training our military requires to remain strong, but I believe it’s the work such as these we see today and keeping promises and helping to build our islands together that is the true showcase of our nation’s strength.” (PR)



Commonwealth Utilities Corporation
3rd Floor, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building I.P.O. Box 501220 CK • Saipan, MP 96950-1220
Telephone: (670) 664-4282 • Facsimile: (670) 235-5131



PUBLIC NOTICE

Pursuant to the Open Government Act (1 CMC §9901 et seq), the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (“CUC”) Board of Directors hereby informs the general public that the Board will hold its regular board meeting on **Wednesday, January 12, 2022, at 10:00 a.m.** The meeting will be held at the CUC Conference Room, Room 17, 3rd Floor, Joeten Dandan Building. The following agenda will be considered and public attendance is welcome.

AGENDA*

I. Preliminary Matters

A. Call to Order

B. Roll Call

C. Adoption of Agenda

D. Adoption of Minutes

1. September 3, 2021 Regular Board Meeting

2. October 12, 2021 Special Board Meeting

3. October 22, 2021 Special Board Meeting

E. Correspondence

II. Management Reports

A. Executive Director’s Report

B. Chief Financial Officer’s Report

III. Committee Reports

A. Personnel Committee

A.1 Classification/Tier

A.2 Administrative Hearings/Appeals

B. Operations Committee

IV. Old Business

A. Update on Power Plant, DE5 and DE7

B. Update on Payment Kiosks

C. Update on 5% Employees’ Performance Base Increase

D. Update on Telesource - Wartsila Engines/Contract

E. Update on Procurement Regulations Proposed Amendments

V. New Business

A. Resolution No. 2021-01 – Change of Signatory Requirements

B. Amendments on Regulations/Policies

C. Organizational Chart

VI. Public Comments**

VII. Executive Session***

VIII. Announcements

IX. Adjournment


/s/

MIRANDA V. MANGLONA, Chairwoman


* In accordance with Public Law 8-41, additional agenda items may be added to the above listing only by a recorded vote of the majority members of the governing body.

** All interested persons are welcome to attend, and submit written and oral testimony on the above-agenda items. Public Comments are limited to 30 minutes and each remark is limited to three minutes

*** Pursuant to 1 CMC §9912, the CUC Board of Directors may vote to meet at any time in executive session, in consultation with the Legal Counsel on matters deemed privileged and confidential.



Commonwealth Utilities Corporation



INVITATION FOR BIDS
CUC-IFB-22-015

SUPPLY AND DELIVERY OF HEAVY EQUIPMENT

The Office of the Executive Director for the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids for the supply and delivery of heavy equipment for its fleet in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

This project is funded from the United States Department of the Interior (US DOI), Office of the Insular Affairs (OIA).

Prospective Bidders must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of \$100.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

One (1) original and Five (5) hard copies must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked **“CUC-IFB-22-015, Supply and Delivery of Heavy Equipment”** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, **no later than 10:00 AM (ChST) on February 3, 2022** at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Bids mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before due date and time or post-marked before submission deadline. Late submissions and conditional offers will not be considered.

A Bid Guarantee of fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The security deposit may be in cash, certified check, cashier’s check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers’ questions, concerns and qualification should be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI’s Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI’s Insurance Code.

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor’s preparation of a bid or supply under the contract. The IFB does not commit CUC to award a contract, to pay any cost incurred in the preparation of the bid under this request, or to procure or contract for goods. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed as per the CUC Procurement Regulations.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from registered Proponents and must be submitted in writing **no later than 10:00 AM (ChST) on January 20, 2022**, to Manny B. Sablan, CUC’s Purchasing Administrator, via email manny.sablan@cucgov.org with copies to Yvonne C. Ogumoro, CUC’s Acting Water/Wastewater Division Manager via email at yvonne.ogumoro@cucgov.org and Christie L. Sablan, CUC’s Senior Administrative Technician at christie.sablan@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids for any reason and waive any defects in the said bids, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All bids submitted shall become the property of CUC.

GARY P. CAMACHO
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The National Park Service has selected Frank Lands to serve as the regional director for parks in the Pacific West covering Department of the Interior regions 8, 9, 10, and 12. This means Lands will provide leadership for more than 65 parks in California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, parts of Arizona and Montana, and the territories of Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands.

Lands has more than 20 years of experience managing natural and cultural resources and conservation programs with the U.S. Army. He comes to the position from U.S. Army Fort Bliss, Texas, where he served as the deputy garrison commander. Lands begins his new role on January 16.

“Frank comes to the National Park Service with a wealth of leadership experience guiding natural resources, cultural resources, and conservation programs with the U.S. Army

as well as infrastructure and emergency services and public safety programs having overseen operations at one of the most diverse garrisons in our nation’s military,” said NPS Deputy Director Shawn Benge. “His experience aligns with the NPS mission and will support the needs of one of our largest regions as the NPS continues to address the challenges of unprecedented wildfires, drought, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.”

“Throughout my career, I have looked for opportunities to get back to my natural resource roots,” said Lands. “It is an honor to support the mission of the National Park Service and the people who protect and preserve some of our nation’s most significant places. I am excited to work with parks and programs to support the Great American Outdoors Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. I look forward to our work together to reduce maintenance backlog, improve infrastructure, and the opportunity to explore the more than 65

Traffic interruption for installation of concrete power poles on Jan. 8

There will be road closures and detours on Saturday, Jan. 8, 2022, from 5am to 2:30pm along the traffic light intersection of Beach Road San Jose and Chalan Monsignor Guerrero Road near Atkins Kroll. This will allow the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. to replace two wooden power poles with concrete power poles and install one additional concrete power pole.

■ Roads to be affected (5am to 8am): All eastbound turn traffic on Chalan Monsignor Guerrero Road will be closed from 5am to 8am; eastbound traffic will be detoured from Amorsch Way south of the

Modern Stationary building.

■ Roads to be affected (9am to 12:00pm): Northbound turn traffic on Chalan Monsignor Guerrero Road will be closed from 9am to 12pm; northbound traffic will be detoured from the Chalan Kiya traffic light.

■ Roads to be affected (12:00pm to 2:30pm): Northbound outer lane in front of the Marianas Visitors Authority office will be closed and tapered into the inner lane from 12pm to 2:20pm.

For more information, contact the CUC Customer Hotline (236-4333) or monitor our Facebook page. (PR)

National Park Service selects Frank Lands as regional director

parks throughout the region.”

Lands began his career with the U.S. Army as an environmental specialist and forester in 2000. Over the last 10 years, he has held deputy garrison commander positions at five large Army posts and installations. One of these positions was in Italy, where he created a program to connect Americans to their new Italian communities. Through his work, he collaborated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish a memorandum of understanding for improved endangered species management on behalf of the U.S. Army

Installation Management Command Atlantic Region. He has been deployed to Iraq twice to support infrastructure and installation management activities for the U.S. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development. In addition, he served seven years in the U.S. Army Military Police.

Most recently Lands served as the deputy garrison commander of Fort Bliss, Texas where he led installation operations in support of the Depart-



Lands

ment of Health and Human Services mission to house 10,000 unaccompanied children, and the departments of State and Homeland Security’s missions to house and assimilate over 10,000 Afghanistan

evacuees. Lands has also led multimillion-dollar capital improvement projects and worked to address a U.S. Army housing need in Fort Bliss, Texas. In the same role, he managed the largest cultural resource management program in the Army with

more than 19,000 archeological sites and 550 historic buildings. Additionally, he led a workforce of over 3,800 military, civilian, and contractor professionals. His U.S. Army experience has fostered relationships with federal, local, and international governments to improve collaboration and communication.

Lands holds a master of public administration from the University of Texas, a master of strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College, and a bachelor of science in forestry and natural resources from Ohio State University. (PR)

COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY
MAIN OFFICE: SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 2ND FLOOR ARRIVAL BLDG.
PO BOX 501065, SAIPAN MP 96950
PHONE: (1-670) 237-6500/1 • FAX: (1-670) 234-5962
WEBSITE: WWW.CNMIIMPORTS.COM

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION STATEMENTS FOR ARCHITECTURAL/ENGINEERING DESIGN SERVICES

PORT OF SAIPAN
CPA OFFICE LEAK REPAIRS
PROJECT NO. CPA-SS-001-22

The Commonwealth Ports Authority's (CPA) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, CPA is soliciting statements of professional qualifications from interested consultants for Architectural and Engineering (A/E) Design Services for the CPA Office Leak Repairs at the Captain George F. Fleming Memorial Building at the Port of Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, Project No. CPA-SS-001-22.

These services are being funded by CPA and is in accordance with CPA's Procurement Rules and Regulations, Section 40-50-202, Architect-Engineer Design and Construction Management Services.

The Request for Qualification (RFQ) Package is available at CPA's Administration Office, 2nd floor of the arrival terminal at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport. No fee is required for obtaining the proposal package. Electronic copies may be made available upon written request to Ms. Wendi Prater, CPA's Executive Assistant/Project Manager, at wprater@cnmiports.com or Ms. Sheri N. Llagas at cpa.receptionist@pticom.com.

Questions or inquiries regarding this request for qualification statements must be submitted to Ms. Prater via email at wprater@cnmiports.com or hand delivered to the CPA Administration Office by no later than 5:00 p.m. CHST, Friday, January 14, 2022.

The statements of professional qualification will be evaluated based on the criteria available in the RFQ package.

Interested consultants are requested to submit one (1) original, four (4) copies and one (1) electronic version in .pdf of their statements of professional qualifications no later than 5:00 p.m. CHST, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2022. Statements of qualification must be presented by a combination of both brochures and the use of current U.S. Government Standard Form 330.

The CPA reserves the right to reject any or all statements of professional qualification for any reason, if in its sole opinion to do so would be in its best interest.

/s/ CHRISTOPHER S. TENORIO
Executive Director
Date: December 28, 2021

Commonwealth Utilities Corporation
3rd Floor, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building
P.O. Box 501220 CK • Saipan, MP 96950-1220
Telephone: (670) 664-4282 • Facsimile: (670) 235-5131

PUBLIC NOTICE

Pursuant to the Open Government Act (1 CMC §9901 et seq), the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation ("CUC") Board of Directors hereby informs the general public that the Board will hold a Special Board meeting on Tuesday, January 11, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. The meeting will be held at the CHCC Administrative Office, Conference Room 3. The following agenda will be considered and public attendance is welcome.

AGENDA

I. Preliminary Matters
A. Call to Order
B. Roll Call
C. Reading of the Notice of the Agenda
D. Adoption of Agenda

II. Public Comments*
III. Discussion
A. CHCC's Current Billing and Arrears
B. Review of CHCC's Draft Proposal on Reconciliation of Arrears.

IV. Executive Session**
V. Announcements
VI. Adjournment

/s/
MIRANDA V. MANGLONA, Chairwoman

* In accordance with Public Law 8-41, additional agenda items may be added to the above listing only by a recorded vote of the majority members of the governing body.
** All interested persons are welcome to attend, and submit written and oral testimony on the above-agenda items. Public Comments are limited to 30 minutes and each remark is limited to three minutes.
*** Pursuant to 1 CMC §9912, the CUC Board of Directors may vote to meet at any time in executive session, in consultation with the Legal Counsel on matters deemed privileged and confidential.

MARK SCOGGINS
SCOGGINS LAW OFFICE, LLC
2nd Floor, MIC Building, Chalan Monsignor Guerrero San Jose Village
P.O. Box 501127, Saipan, MP 96950-1127
Telephone Nos.: (670) 234-7455/7427
Facsimile No.: (670) 234-7256

Attorney for Petitioner.

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

In Re The Estate of CONCEPCION VILLAGOMEZ GUERRERO, Deceased.
Civil Action No. 22-0001
NOTICE OF HEARING / NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Date: January 27, 2022
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Judge: Honorable Joseph N. Camacho

TO: THE HEIRS, GENERAL PUBLIC AND CREDITORS OF THE DECEDENT OR OF HIS ESTATE

Notice is hereby given that the Petitioner, Roy P. Guerrero, has filed a Petition For Letters of Administration in the above-entitled Estate proceeding pursuant to Rule 15, Com. R. Prob.

A hearing on the petition will be conducted by the Court on January 27, 2022 at 10:00 a.m. in Courtroom 220A, Superior Court. All persons interested are hereby notified to appear at the hearing and show cause, if any, why the order should not be made.

Pursuant to Rule 21, Com. R. Prob., notice is hereby given to all creditors of the Decedent or her Estate that they must file their claims with the Clerk of Court within sixty (60) days of the publication of this notice. A copy of the claim of any creditor should be sent to Attorney Mark Scoggins at the above indicated address.

Reference is hereby made to the petition for further particulars.

SO NOTICED this January 3, 2022.

/s/ HON. JOSEPH N. CAMACHO
Associate Judge, CNMI Superior Court

JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

NAME OF EMPLOYER: Kang Corporation

THE POSITION: Accountant

JOB DESCRIPTION: General Duties: Analyzes financial information and prepare financial reports to determine or maintain records of assets, liabilities, profits and loss, tax liability or other financial activities within the organization; and Performs professional operating or cost accounting work requiring knowledge of the theory and practice of recording, classifying, examining, and analyzing the data and records of financial transactions. Specific Duties: Analyzes the effects of transactions upon account relationships; Evaluates alternative means of treating transactions; Plans the way account structures should be developed or modified; Assures the adequacy of the accounting system as the basis for reporting to management; Considers the need for new or changed controls; Projects accounting data to show the effects of proposed plans on capital investments, income, cash position, and overall financial condition; Interprets the meaning of accounting records, reports, and statements; Advises management on accounting matters; and Recommends improvements, adaptations, or revisions in the accounting system and procedures.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:
EDUCATION: Must have a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting.
EXPERIENCE: Must have at least 24 months of relevant work experience as an Accountant.
SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS: Must be knowledgeable on the use of various accounting softwares; Must be computer literate; and Must possess excellent written and verbal communication skills.

JOB SITE: Amare PI Pale Arnold Road, Chalan Lauau, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

HOW TO APPLY: Submit or mail comprehensive resume and/or application letter to: KANG HEE KIM, President, Kang Corporation.

Office Address: Amare PI Pale Arnold Road, Chalan Lauau Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 503053, Saipan, MP 96950
Email Address: kangparts@hotmail.com
Telephone Number: Tel. 1(670) 235-9369

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
BOARD OF PAROLE
P.O. BOX 502641, Saipan, MP 96950-2641
Tel: Nos.: (670) 664-3300 • FAX: (670) 664-3310
E-mail: nickreyes.bop@gmail.com

TO ALL MEDIA SERVICES
PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

MESSAGE: The Honorable Ralph DLG. Torres, Governor and Honorable Arnold I. Palacios, Lt. Governor, through the Board of Parole office, and pursuant to Public Law 8-41, Section II of the "Open Government Act of 1992," hereby give Official Notice that an Executive Board Meeting is scheduled for January 14th, 2022 (Friday) at 10:00a.m. at the Department of Public Safety Training Facility, Sususpe Saipan MP 96950. The agenda is as follows:

Executive Meeting Agenda
Department of Public Safety Training Facility, Susupe, Saipan, MP 96950
January 14th, 2022, 9:00 a.m.

I. Preliminary Matters
1. Call to order
2. Roll call
3. Presence of Quorum

II. Consent Items
1. Adoption of Agenda
2. Adoption of Meeting Minutes
a. Parole Hearing/Clemency Hearing July 12th – 16th, 2021
b. Exec. Meeting Min July 16th, 2021
c. Exec. Meeting Min August 23rd & 24th, 2021

III. Old Business
A. Proposed Revision of Regulations/Chapter 115
B. Salary Adjustment for Chief Parole Office
C. Hiring/Job Opportunity for Parole Officer I, II, III
D. Reallocation of Current Administrative Assistant to Administrative Specialist I

IV. Miscellaneous
A. Schedule of Next Parole Hearing
B. Schedule Next Executive Meeting

If deemed necessary, members of the Board of Parole may elect to vote to meet in Executive Session to discuss any of the items listed above.

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
BOARD OF PAROLE
P.O. BOX 502641, Saipan, MP 96950-2641
Tel: Nos.: (670) 664-3300 • FAX: (670) 664-3310
E-mail: nickreyes.bop@gmail.com

TO ALL MEDIA SERVICES
PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

MESSAGE: The Honorable Ralph Dlg. Torres, Governor and the Honorable Arnold I. Palacios, Lt Governor, through the CNMI Board of Parole Office, and pursuant to the Public Law 8-41, Section II of the "Open Government Act of 1992," hereby give Official Notice that a Parole Hearing is scheduled for January 12th & 13th, 2022 (Wednesday – Thursday), beginning at 9:00 a.m., at the Department of Public Safety Training Facility, located at Susupe, Saipan MP 96950. The Agenda is as follows:

CNMI Board of Parole Hearing Agenda

I. Preliminary Matters
1. Call to order
2. Roll Call
3. Presence of Quorum

II. Consent Items
1. Adoption of Agenda

III. Parole Hearing
BOP NO.: Criminal Case No.:
1. Clifford Jack Palacios 22-001 19-0115D
2. Eric William Rabauliman 22-002-RA 08-0220
3. Jesse James Camacho 22-003-RA 98-0175D/00-0250D/16-0225
4. Robert Shineachi 22-004 10-0019C
5. Francisco Pua 22-005 05-0132D

IV. Adjournment

If deemed necessary, members of the Board of Parole may elect to vote to meet in Executive Session to discuss any of the items listed above.

If you have any question or need additional information, please contact the Board of Parole Office at telephone numbers 664-3300 or 664-3302.

/s/ Ramon B. Camacho
BOP Chairman
Date: Jan. 5, 2022

Opinion

Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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AP The Associated Press

Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

Dirty rotten scoundrels may finally be getting their due

Two high-profile criminal cases at opposite ends of the country are putting a much-needed focus on the legalities—or illegalities—of lying. Americans for too long have justified lying as a tolerable offshoot of the brash entrepreneurial spirit that spurred industry and created \$2 trillion tech empires like Apple and Microsoft. Fake it till you make it became accepted as a legitimate route to success, as if duping investors was somehow admirable.

There's no crime in articulating dreams and aspirations, no matter how inflated or unrealistic. It's entirely a different matter to defraud investors, lenders or tax authorities by lying. In California, entrepreneur Elizabeth Holmes found out the hard way that too much emphasis on faking it can lead to serious prison time. And former President Donald Trump could be in for his own rude awakening if New York prosecutors get their way.

Holmes, 37, founded a company called Theranos when she was only 19 and lured investors based on the promise that her technology could detect a wide array of illnesses with a simple pin-prick of blood instead of the expensive barrage of individual tests that typically are required to make diagnoses. Holmes' grandiose claims of proven results led big investors to channel billions of dollars her way. Major personalities such as Bill Clinton, Joe Biden and Henry Kissinger endorsed her as an inspirational figure for young women. A California jury found her guilty Monday on four counts of defrauding investors out of more than \$1 billion.

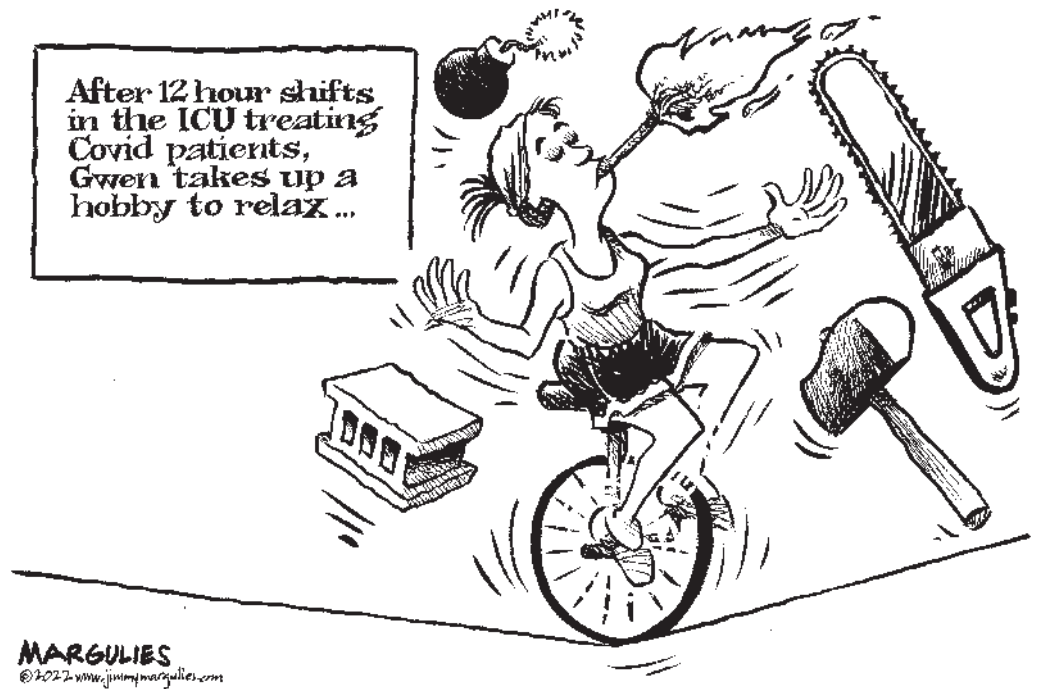
In New York, prosecutors are closing in on Trump and his family members for a different kind of lying. Before becoming president, Trump was infamous for making wild claims about his own wealth. The numbers he cited were almost impossible to confirm, and the more he talked, the bigger his net worth seemed to get.

In a 2016 federal filing, Trump claimed to be worth more than \$10 billion. The myth of Trump as a self-made billionaire inspired many working-class voters to swing to his side in 2016. Subsequent investigations, however, revealed him to be nothing but a big talker who was mired in debt. And that's what got him into trouble.

When he was trying to convince big banks, including Germany's Deutsche Bank, to lend him more money, Trump inflated the values of his properties and his own net worth. But when it came to filing his tax returns, Trump reportedly low-balled his company's performance as a way of reducing his tax burden. The New York state attorney general's office has subpoenaed two of Trump's children as part of its ongoing civil probe, while a separate criminal investigation is under way by the Manhattan district attorney.

Americans should continue to celebrate visionaries who make millions or billions by turning big ideas into realities. But it's also time to celebrate bringing lying hucksters to justice.

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A reality-check: Thank you, Gov. Torres

First of three parts

About this time of the year back in 2014 I wrote a letter to the editor titled "Let's Keep Moving Forward" as a response to individuals who, in the runup to an election, were attacking former governor Eloy S. Inos. Some of these individuals are the same ones who have relentlessly attacked Gov. Ralph DLG Torres. In a few short months, former governor Inos had put himself and his credibility on the line to come to a permanent resolution to the decades of retirement program funding issues. He did this despite the attacks from the other side about how he was shortchanging the program and calling for his removal. The long and short of it was...Gov. Inos was right and his naysayers were plain wrong.

Gov. Inos placed a lot of trust in then-Lt. Gov. Torres, the tremendously difficult work of the Commonwealth, primarily the rebuilding of the CNMI after Super Typhoon Soudelor, which was exceptionally managed. Upon Gov. Inos' passing in 2015, Lt. Gov. Torres via the Constitution assumed the role of governor. Some of the same individuals who have led the non-stop attacks against him were at the time vocally challenging his assumption to the position on social media and blogs, despite the clear language of our Constitution.

It's important that we recall what the state of the Commonwealth was back in 2013 and 2014. We were into the eighth year of hemorrhaging jobs, tourism had hit rock bottom, crimes like theft were at levels we had never seen, the Retirement Fund was not making pension payments on time, reducing payments, and in threat of running completely out of funding, public services were severely depleted, we had lost our control of immigration and, well, the future of the CNMI looked incredibly bleak. On top of all of this, we were hit by Soudelor, the most destructive super typhoon we'd seen to that date. There would be no resumption of tourism, there would be no turn in the job market, there would be no repairing our dilapidated public facilities, there would be no increases in pay, there would be no seeing a robust economy. That obviously wasn't the feeling of and didn't stop Gov. Inos and his young Lt. Gov. Torres from immediately working to change this reality.

Gov. Inos assumed the governorship and hit the ground running immediately, personally interjecting himself into the Retirement Fund case, which was at the federal court. He was key to working with the court to craft the Settlement Fund, which inarguably saved pensions. I know this because I was there, a member of an active employee organization who was trying to intervene in the ongoing Retirement Fund lawsuit, to ensure the interests of long-time active employee members of the Retirement Fund were protected and represented.

I did not know Gov. Inos that well, but I was incredibly affect-

By **ROBERT HUNTER**

Special to the Saipan Tribune

Robert Hunter is the senior policy adviser at the Office of the Governor.



ed by his showing up in person at the federal court to work with the judge and parties to forge a way forward. I was supremely proud. His detractors, who bemoaned his decisions (again, some of the same folks who've relentlessly attacked Gov. Torres), who were also working for their own interests and completely unwilling to compromise, as time has proven, were simply wrong.

Sadly, Gov. Inos' time in office was brief. I think I would not be wrong to suggest that many in the community were worried. We were seeing positive changes, we were in the midst of a disaster recovery, and our governor was gone. I knew little about Gov. Torres. It was a very uncertain time.

On top of tackling the eight-year-long severe economic depression, our new governor was faced with handling the management of the worst disaster to beset the CNMI in its history, Super Typhoon Soudelor...and by all accounts he did an exemplary job. He championed getting our visitor-industry back online and growing again, seeing new airlines enter the market for the first time in decades. We saw investors coming into the CNMI like we had not seen since the '80s. We saw new businesses open. We saw a total turnaround in the job market. We saw average pay rise to the highest levels in CNMI history. More citizens were employed than at any time in CNMI history. The governor led the push to see public employee pay raised across the board for the first time in over 20 years. The governor's work with the federal government saw the effects of the reduction in foreign labor stymied. We saw new parks opened, new community centers opened, community and youth centers renovated, and our sports facilities cleaned up. We saw tourist sites cleaned up. We saw roads paved. We saw public safety offices open in the villages. And although we were hit with, and set back by, the one-two punches of Super Typhoon Yutu and the COVID-19 pandemic, and Typhoon Mankghut that devastated Rota, the leadership of Gov. Torres through all of these incredible challenges has positively affected every resident of the Commonwealth. It has, in fact, been exemplary leadership in the face of our worst disasters.

Despite all of the enormous challenges Gov. Torres has had to tackle and has done so in exceptional fashion, and despite all of the incredible successes and significant progress in-between

See **REALITY-CHECK** on Next Page

EDITORIAL POLICY

Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

GCEA shares outlook for 2022

This past year saw the continuation of the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic to the CNMI community and economy. The dramatic reduction in tourism arrivals and the constant threat of widespread outbreaks have led to severe impacts on employment, business revenue, and our way of life in the Marianas.

However, through these challenges, we have also seen the strength of the foundation of our community and how this foundation will lead us to even greater opportunities in the years ahead. As the New Year has begun, so has the renewed opportunity to raise the Marianas' standard of living and better improve the quality of life for all residents. The issues we have faced in 2021 have refined our vision to target these areas in the year ahead:

Destination transformation and Marianas Village Pride

It is the GCEA's vision to build the Marianas to become a world-class destination not only for our visitors but most especially for everyone who calls the islands home. Our goal is to achieve this together within the next 10 years. This long-term plan requires thoughtful visioning and careful planning. It requires commitment, cooperation, and support from everyone in the Marianas. It won't happen overnight, but to get there, we have to achieve milestone after milestone toward this goal, and we believe that Together, We Can!

The GCEA will bring together community organizations, business partners, and government agencies to work toward the goal of transforming our sites and public facilities across Rota, Tinian, and Saipan. In 2022, we will see even more transformative changes to the sites owned by our community. Together, we will enhance their beauty, strengthen their sustainability, and increase their usability for all to enjoy.

This ties in with our new initiative for the coming year. We will be transforming our public sites and providing opportunities for residents to take pride and ownership of their homes,

schools, and businesses. We will expand on the Marianas Village Pride campaign and look forward to working even closer with our mayors, schools, and residents to highlight the uniqueness of each village, foster pride in our local communities, build partnerships among neighbors, and create a sense of ownership of the Marianas.

Environment

The environment is our most valuable resource. Littering, illegal dumping, and issues with solid waste management threaten the growth and safety of our islands. GCEA's initiative to create a universal garbage collection system for the Marianas led to the establishment of the Universal Garbage Collection Task Force, which recently submitted its recommendations to Gov. Ralph DLG Torres. The council will continue this important discussion to make UGC a reality for our community and our environment. Additionally, the council further supports the UGC Task Force's recommendation to establish the Governor's Environmental Council to advance the community's participation in the critical issues facing our environment.

Infrastructure

In 2022, the council seeks to improve the relationships among government agencies, the private sector, and federal funding opportunities. We look forward to the further implementation of electronic permitting, the transition to e-government platforms, and the streamlining of procurement and permitting, all of which can positively affect the Marianas' recovery and revitalization efforts.

Interisland transportation

The Marianas is a unique multi-island destination that holds opportunities for diverse commercial development and economic growth. The Marianas as a vibrant multi-island destination has been outlined by reports provided by the council, but hinges upon reliable, sustainable, and affordable transportation options. Establishing interisland transportation is more obtainable than

TOGETHER, WE CAN

By JERRY TAN

Special to the Saipan Tribune



Jerry Tan is the chief executive officer of Tan Holdings Corp. and the co-chairman of the Governor's Council of Economic Advisers. As a recognized entrepreneur and employer, Tan is a passionate advocate for volunteerism and giving back to the community.

ever with the wealth of resources provided by the federal government and the strong partnerships between the public and private sectors. There have been major milestones achieved so far. The designation of the Marianas' first Marine Highway established through the good work of the Commonwealth Ports Authority, led by chairwoman Kimberlyn King-Hinds, provides more opportunities to build stronger connections between the islands.

As much as we'd love to see our recommendations come to fruition overnight, we know that they will take time, planning, and adjusting when difficulties come about. We are confident in our community's commitment to helping the Marianas reach its full potential.

Every resident is a valuable stakeholder in making the Marianas a better place to live. We can all lend a hand by picking up trash, painting medians and bus stops, and clearing overgrown trails. It can be as simple as leaving the beaches and parks cleaner than how we find them. No effort is ever too small, and collectively we can help take better care of our islands.

I thank each council member, PPP volunteers, government agencies, corporate and nonprofit partners, mayors, and our community for their service and commitment to the Marianas. Our islands' success relies on every one of us.

Together, We Can!

For more information, visit the GCEA at cnmieconomy.com, on Facebook and Instagram (@cnmigov.economy), or contact them at gceacnmi@gmail.com.

Babauta responds to Torres

I have read the governor's statement and I join him in thanking the all of the members of the bipartisan Special Investigating Committee on Impeachment for their unanimous support to put this matter to a vote before the full House of Representatives. It speaks to the diligent and meticulous task undertaken by the JGO committee. They acted in accordance to their belief that the JGO did their duty and it is time for the whole House to act.

We have provided the governor ample opportunity to respond to the allegations under oath, but so far he has only responded by repeatedly refusing to testify under oath, failing to appear, issuing scripted videos, asserting immunity, essentially issuing a gag order over Department of Public Safety Commissioner Robert Guerrero, and the governor's executive assistant, Frances Dela Cruz, and most recently by filing a lawsuit to quash his subpoena.

Publicly, the governor, through his press releases and weekly

briefings, portrays himself as the victim of bullies and someone who is ready and willing to comply with the legal process, but his actions behind the scenes speak louder than his empty words.

The governor attempted to dictate the process of his investigation by discrediting elected members of the Legislative Branch and hand-picking House members he felt would be more sympathetic to his cause.

Worse yet, he then attempted to manipulate the Judicial Branch by requesting a closed-door meeting between himself and the chief justice, which explicitly violates the model rules of professional conduct. When this was denied, he then issued a letter questioning the integrity of the entire CNMI Judiciary, past and present, to preside over his lawsuit.

Mind you, the governor has done all of this with the assistance of his in-house legal counsel and his high-priced legal team that continues to cost CNMI taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dol-

by the way, if this is false, I'm still waiting for the lawsuit...), and whose actual accomplishments would fit into the space of a single period in Gov. Torres' novel-long list of accomplishments, she sees this JGO circus as the instrument needed to finally steal political power. She's been throwing around the possibility of "impeachment" after all, for many years now. Can't win 'em through a legitimate election...let's impeach.

And then there are Sablan's "flawed-squad." You've got the representative who escaped an ethics investigation hearing related to serious allegations of sexual impropriety involving minors and students by resigning and then coming back into the Legislature when his party members were in the majority. These are allegations that led to the identification of eight women, seven of whom made statements, and several of whom were underage at the time of the alleged incidents. You better believe that even one of these same allegations were made against a political opponent of the current House majority ethics investigations and calls for removal would be in immediate order. Instead, the hypocritical majority has turned a completely blind eye to these very serious allegations. Ice chests and SD cards acquired by the Governor's Office for work, and business-class seating and utilities

By CELINA BABUTA

Special to the Saipan Tribune



Rep. Celina Babuta (D-Saipan) chairs the House of Representatives' Judiciary and Governmental Operations Committee.

lars while legal fees incurred by our in-house counsel from the Legislative Bureau have not cost a single dime.

Lastly, I am troubled by the governor's repeated statements that he is finally going to obtain a fair trial in the Senate. The more he says this, the more he undermines the integrity of the process. That said, I am confident that when presented with the details of the governor's misdeeds, our senators will agree to find the governor guilty of the charges listed in the articles of impeachment.

that every CNMI governor has received is the utmost concern of the House? Not allegations of gross sexual misconduct that involved minors and students? Seriously?

I won't out individual by individual, you get my drift. You've got a gaggle of politically-motivated individuals with zero accomplishments under their belts who see this as their opportunity to finally thwart the voters and steal the political power they've been working overtime for. They have the resources of their offices and zero other ideas of real merit for the CNMI, except to forward their political positions. All one needs to do is look at their histories. What have they garnered for the CNMI? What great improvements have they championed for their precincts? What resources of note have they brought to the CNMI? Have they created community or have they created divisiveness? Have they ushered in new development, new industry, or better industry? In order to understand their motivations, it is important to examine what they have accomplished over their careers. You'll find that collective "list" extremely brief.

To be continued.






REALITY-CHECK

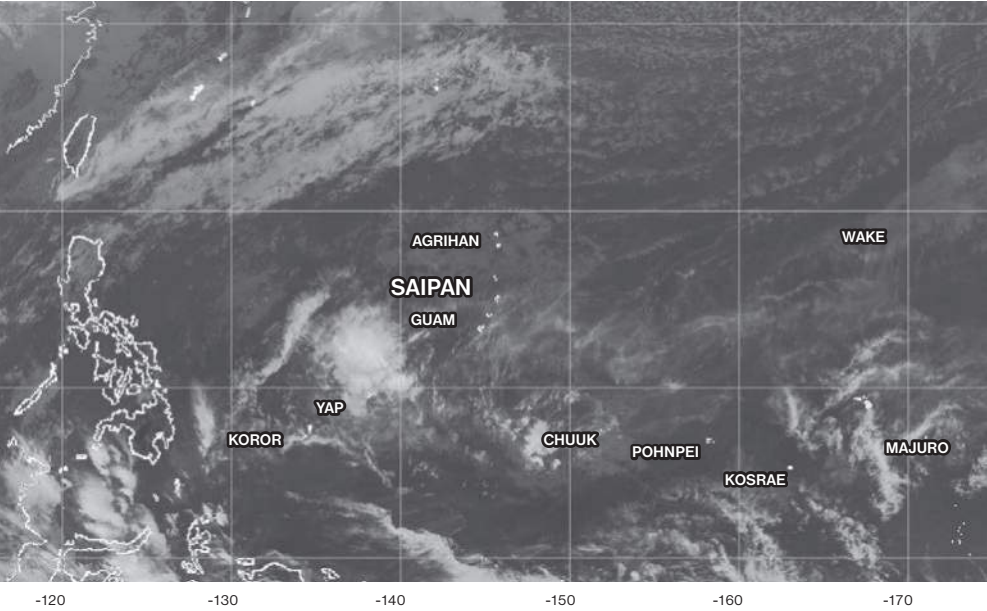
From Page 10

the natural disasters, his political detractors have been constant in their attacks. These individuals have acknowledged none of the incredible work of the governor but have worked overtime to try to negate any of the accomplishments, criticize, and thwart successes at every turn. As they have been unsuccessful unseating him in regular elections, their rhetoric has been ramped up. More recently, they have used the cover and resources of their offices to try to do what they've been unable to do through fair elections...remove him.

Unhappy with the results of the first round of investigative hearings, the political opponents of the governor decided to hold a re-do. Spearheaded by a career-long political opponent of the governor and announced gubernatorial opponent in the upcoming election, "no conflict of interest here" Tina Sablan, who has never retreated from lying as necessary to besmirch the administration's record and who in her personal business has willfully (and dangerously) violated Commonwealth laws (and

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN									
TODAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY	
									
Breezy. Partly cloudy with a 10 percent chance of showers. East winds 15 to 25 mph with occasional stronger gusts up to 35 mph.		Partly cloudy with a 10 percent chance of showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph		Partly cloudy with isolated light showers.		Partly cloudy with isolated light showers.		Partly cloudy with isolated light showers.	
86°	76°	76°	86°	76°	86°	76°	86°	76°	86°



PICTURE TIME: 7:27 AM, THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 2022
Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Mostly cloudy with mostly scattered light to occasional moderate showers and fresh to strong winds continue to prevail across the region. Ipan buoy overnight reported seas around 7 feet while the latest altimetry data show seas between 8 and 11 feet across the waters.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

STOP THE SPREAD

The Governor's COVID-19 Task Force and Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. continue to encourage residents within the Marianas to practice social distancing, which means avoiding close contact with people in order to avoid catching the virus yourself and to avoid passing it on to others.


- Stay home as much as possible. Avoid unnecessary travel or public places.
- Avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10.
- Choose drive-thru, take-out, or delivery options, or outdoor seating, if available, when dining in.
- Send only one healthy adult from the household run necessary errands, such as getting groceries or picking up medications. Leave children, elderly, and other vulnerable people at home as much as possible. When returning home from an errand, wash your hands before doing anything else.
- Older adults and people with chronic medical conditions are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness. People at high risk should stay at home as much as possible.
- Create a household plan of action, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/checklisthousehold-ready.html>
- Ensure a 30-day supply of all medicines.

Continue good hand hygiene

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, avoid touching your face, cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available.

Know the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do if you become symptomatic

- Stay home when you are sick and if you recently traveled to a place with COVID-19. Self-quarantine means:
 - Choosing a room in your house that can be used to separate sick household members from others.
 - Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.



onds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Limiting visitors

CHCC appreciates the patience and understanding of the community at this time. To obtain general information about the CNMI COVID-19 response, contact the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force Hotline at 287-0046, 287-0489, 287-1089. These numbers are available Monday to Sunday, 7:30am - 4:30pm.

For medical information about COVID-19, reach out to the COVID-19 Infoline at the following numbers: 285-1672/1352. These numbers are available Monday to Friday, 7:30am - 4:30pm.

For mental health support and helpful tips during a crisis, call the Mental Health Support Line at 285-1856, 323-6560, 323-6561 These numbers are available Monday to Friday, 7:30am - 4:30 pm. For the 24/7 Disaster Distress Helpline, call SAMSHA at 1-800-985-5990.

For more information about DIY face coverings, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

For more information about CHCC programs, follow CHCC on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter at @cnmichcc, check out our website at www.chcc.gov.mp or call us at (670) 234-8950.

For more information on the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force, visit www.governor.gov.mp and, follow @GovernorCNMI on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

This health advisory may be found online at <http://www.chcc.gov.mp/pressrelease.html> and at www.governor.gov.mp/covid-19.

Rumor control

During crises like this, oftentimes the spread of misinformation is just as dangerous as the virus itself. The CNMI is reminded to only share official and verified notices, press releases, and advisories from the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force and CHCC.

Source: Office of the Governor

MICRONESIA			▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Thunderstorms	83 / 77 °F	
Palau	Thunderstorms	84 / 77 °F	
Yap	Thunderstorms	85 / 77 °F	
Chuuk	Partly Cloudy	85 / 80 °F	
Pohnpei	Partly Cloudy	85 / 78 °F	
Kosrae	Scattered Thunderstorms	85 / 80 °F	
Majuro	Partly Cloudy	85 / 79 °F	

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:44 AM	6:01 PM
Saturday	6:45 AM	6:01 PM
Sunday	6:45 AM	6:02 PM
Monday	6:45 AM	6:03 PM
Tuesday	6:45 AM	6:03 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	10:32 AM	10:32PM	-
Saturday	11:11 AM	11:24 PM	-
Sunday	11:48 AM	11:24 PM	-
Monday	-	12:13 AM	12:24 PM
Tuesday	-	1:01 PM	1:00 PM

AROUND THE GLOBE			▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	AM Showers	71 / 61 °F	
Beijing	Partly Cloudy	42 / 21 °F	
Hong Kong	Partly Cloud	67 / 59 °F	
Honolulu	Mostly Sunny	79 / 66 °F	
London	PM Light Rain	43 / 35 °F	
Los Angeles	Mostly Cloudy	62 / 50 °F	
Manila	Partly Cloudy	88 / 73 °F	
Melbourne	Thunderstorms	81 / 64 °F	
Miami	Mostly Cloudy	78 / 71 °F	
New York	AM Snow Showers	35 / 22 °F	
Osaka	Partly Cloudy	46 / 32 °F	
Paris	PM Rain	47 / 38 °F	
Busan	Sunny	50 / 30 °F	
Rome	Sunny	56 / 34 °F	
Salem	Sunny	47 / 29 °F	
San Francisco	AM Light Rain	54 / 43 °F	
Seoul	Sunny	37 / 19 °F	
Tokyo	Sunny	74 / 32 °F	
Washington, DC	Mostly Sunny	30 / 17 °F	

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY			FEET
05:01 AM	Low Tide	-0.44	
12:10 PM	High Tide	1.74	
6:05 PM	Low Tide	0.88	
10:37 PM	High Tide	1.45	

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF NOVEMBER 12, 2021

DEPARTURES				ARRIVALS			
SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)				GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN			
UA117	7:20am	8:05am	2, 4, 6	UA116	5:30am	6:16am	2, 4, 6
UA117	9:50am	10:35am	1, 3, 5, 7	UA174	8:00am	8:46am	1, 3, 5, 7
GUAM-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-GUAM			
UA183	8:00pm	9:50pm	Daily	UA184	10:40pm	4:30am+1	2, 5
				UA184	10:55pm	4:45am+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7
SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN			
UA117/183	7:20am	9:50pm	2, 4, 6 via Guam	UA184/174	10:40pm	6:16am+1	5 via Guam
UA117/183	9:50am	9:50pm	1, 3, 5, 7 via Guam	UA184/174	10:40pm	8:46am+1	2 via Guam
				UA184/174	10:55pm	6:16am+1	1, 3 via Guam
				UA184/174	10:55pm	8:46am+1	4, 6, 7 via Guam
SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)				INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN			
7C3406	3:10PM	6:55PM	6	7C3405	8:30AM	2:10PM	6
TW9308	3:20PM	8:00PM	4, 5	OZ6233	9:00AM	2:30PM	6
OZ6243	4:00PM	7:40PM	6	TW9307	10:00AM	2:20PM	4, 5

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF MAY 18, 2021

SAIPAN TO ROTA				ROTA TO SAIPAN			
FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY	FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
1301	8:30AM	9:00AM	Daily	3101	9:30AM	10:00AM	Daily
1302	11:00AM	11:30AM	Daily	3102	12:00AM	12:30AM	Daily
1303	1:30PM	2:00PM	Tues/Wed/Thurs/Fri Daily	3103	1:30PM	3:00PM	Tues/Wed/Thurs/Fri Daily
1304	3:30PM	4:00PM		3104	4:30PM	5:00PM	
ROTA TO GUAM				GUAM TO ROTA			
FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY	FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
3401	12:15	12:45	Temporarily Unavailable	4301	13:00	13:30	Temporarily Unavailable
SAIPAN TO TINIAN				TINIAN TO SAIPAN			
FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY	FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
1201	7:00	7:15	Temporarily Unavailable	2101	7:30	7:45	Temporarily Unavailable
1202	8:00	8:15	Daily	2102	8:30	8:45	Daily
1203	9:00	9:15	Daily	2103	9:30	9:45	Daily
				2104	10:30	10:45	Daily
				2105	11:30	11:45	Daily
				2106	12:30	12:45	Temporarily Unavailable
				2107	13:30	13:45	Temporarily Unavailable
				2108	14:30	14:45	Daily
				2109	15:30	15:45	Daily
				2110	16:30	16:45	Daily
				2111	17:30	17:45	Daily
				2112	18:30	18:45	Temporarily Unavailable

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Business

Fed officials see earlier rate hikes as US hiring recovers

WASHINGTON (AP)—The U.S. job market is nearly healthy enough that the central bank's low-interest rate policies are no longer needed, Federal Reserve officials concluded last month.

Fed officials also expressed concerns in minutes from its December meeting, released Wednesday, that surging inflation was spreading into more areas of the economy and would last longer than they previously expected.

"Many (policymakers) saw the U.S. economy making rapid progress" toward the Fed's goal of "maximum employment," the minutes said. "Several" officials said they felt the goal had already been reached. The economy is still roughly four million jobs short of its pre-pandemic level, though some Fed policymakers increasingly believe that all those jobs may not be recovered, at least not anytime soon, as older Americans retire and some for-



Marriott human resources recruiter Mariela Cuevas, left, talks to Lisbet Oliveros, during a job fair at Hard Rock Stadium, Friday, Sept. 3, 2021, in Miami Gardens, Fla. AP

duction of its ultra-low interest rate policies.

The Fed said last month that it would reduce the monthly bond purchases it has made since the spring of 2020—which are intended to lower long-term rates—at twice the pace it had previously set and will likely end those purchases in March. The accelerated timetable puts the Fed on a path to start hiking its benchmark short-term interest rate as early as this June.

Fed policymakers in December also suggested they could hike the Fed's short-term benchmark interest rate three times this year. That signaled a significant pickup from their September meeting, when the 18 policymakers split over whether to lift rates a single time in 2022.

Even Fed officials who have long been focused on keeping rates low to combat unemployment—such as San Francisco Federal Reserve Bank President Mary Daly and Minneapolis Fed President Neel Kashkari—now cite concerns about high inflation as a reason for raising interest rates this year.

The Fed's key rate, which has been pinned near zero for nearly two years, influences many consumer and business loans, including mortgages, credit cards and auto loans. Rates for those loans may start to rise, too, later this year, though changes in Fed policy don't always immediately feed into other borrowing costs.

Boeing lands airplane order from US budget carrier Allegiant

LAS VEGAS (AP)—Allegiant Air said Wednesday that it will buy 50 Boeing 737 Max jets and take options for 50 more, giving Chicago-based Boeing a major foothold in the discount airline's all-Airbus fleet.

Financial terms were not released. The 737 Max 7 and Max 8 models selected by Allegiant list for \$99.7 million and \$121.6 million apiece, but airlines routinely receive deep discounts.

Allegiant said it will take delivery of the planes from 2023 through 2025.

Maurice Gallagher, the CEO and chairman of parent Allegiant Travel Co., said the Las Vegas-based company will continue to buy used planes but the Boeing deal gives it the flexibility to increase passenger-carrying capacity and retire older planes.

Boeing said the new jets would burn 20% less fuel

than Allegiant's current fleet, which includes 73 Airbus A320 planes and 35 slightly smaller Airbus A319s, according to an airline spokeswoman.

Allegiant previously used MD-80 planes from McDonnell Douglas, which Boeing bought in 1999. The airline retired the last of those planes and went to an all-Airbus fleet in 2018.

Raymond James & Associates, meanwhile, downgraded Allegiant two notches, from "strong buy" to "market perform." Analyst Savanthi Syth said pilot wages are likely to rise, the airline has struggled with flight cancellations despite a conservative schedule, and now faces the complexity of having two makes of aircraft in its fleet.

Most other U.S. airlines' stocks fell less than 2%, but Allegiant closed down 8.8% Wednesday.

mer workers stay home to take care of children.

The minutes underscored the Fed's sharp pivot from what had been its policy through most of the pandemic, as it shifts from keeping interest rates very low to encourage more hiring, to moving quickly towards raising rates to rein in inflation, which has surged to four-decade highs.

Fed officials also voiced rising concerns about inflation, saying that faster rate hikes may be needed, and signaling that they could start reducing the Fed's huge portfolio of bonds more quickly than

expected. Those moves pushed down stock prices after the minutes were released, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average falling almost 400 points at the close of trading. Bond yields also rose in response. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note, a benchmark for setting rates on mortgages and many other kinds of loans, increased to 1.7% soon after the minutes were released, from 1.68% just before.

"Inflation readings had been higher and were more persistent and widespread than previously anticipated," the minutes said. "Some participants noted that ... the percentage of product

categories with substantial price increases continued to climb."

"The minutes ... reflected policymakers' rising discomfort with elevated inflation and stronger confidence in the recovery of the economy and the labor market despite the downside risks due to the Omicron variant," Kathy Bostjancic, chief U.S. financial economist at Oxford Economics, said in a research note.

With inflation worsening and unemployment falling more quickly than many economists expected, Fed Chair Jerome Powell said after the Dec. 14-15 meeting that the central bank was accelerating the re-

Atkins Kroll showcases all-new 2022 Toyota Tundra

TAMUNING, Guam—Atkins Kroll unveiled the all-new 2022 Toyota Tundra during a private launch in the Toyota Showroom Wednesday afternoon. A small audience caught a first glimpse of the completely redesigned and most advanced Tundra to date.

The all-new 2022 Toyota Tundra is the third generation of its namesake and is ready to make a big impression in the full-size truck segment this year. The 2022 Toyota Tundra is born from a pedigree of trucks and SUVs rooted in quality, durability, and reliability.

It comes as no surprise that the all-new Tundra was redesigned from the ground up. It comes with i-Force 3.5L twin-turbo V6 engine with 389 horsepower and 479 lb.-ft of torque. Most notable improvements and enhancements include a molded composite never rust bed with aluminum reinforcement, available remove tail



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Atkins Kroll unveiled the all-new 2022 Toyota Tundra during a private launch in the Toyota Showroom Wednesday afternoon.

gate release, and its new fully boxed steel frame and multi-link rear suspension—all designed to give the new Tundra a towing capacity of up to 12,000 lbs.

The bold exterior styling complements the spacious, well-equipped interior, which hosts Apple Car Play

and Android Auto, a 14-inch audio multimedia touchscreen with Back-up Guide and Straight Path Assist. The Tundra comes standard with Toyota Safety Sense 2.5 featuring pre-collision system with pedestrian detection, full-speed range dynamic radar cruise control, lane de-

parture alert, and automatic high beams.

The 2022 Toyota Tundra is available at Atkins Kroll in limited quantities. Pre-orders are available by visiting www.akguam.com and completing the Pre-Order Form at the top of the homepage.

AK Signature Care is Introduced

Atkins Kroll also introduced the all-new AK Signature Care Program. The program provides up to three years free service for all new and used AK vehicle brands. AK Signature Care is included at no extra charge and buyers have the option to upgrade to a five-year plan. The program is designed to help vehicle owners keep a well-maintained vehicle. The service is based on the manufacturer's suggested maintenance recommendations. More information is available at www.akguam.com as well as AK's social media pages. **(PR)**

Uber rider refunded \$600 bill after interstate shutdown

RICHMOND, Va. (AP)—A Richmond man has been refunded the \$600 he was charged for an Uber ride that became trapped with hundreds of others on an icy stretch of Interstate 95 in Virginia.

Andrew Peters was returning from San Francisco and did not understand the severity of the situation when he took an Uber from Dulles International Airport on Monday and got stuck in the traffic disaster, WTOP-FM reported.

"It was kind of scary," Peters said. "We didn't have any food or water."

Hundreds of motorists were stranded in freezing temperatures along a 40-mile (64-kilometer) stretch of I-95. Police said part of the road became impassable when tractor-trailers jackknifed in a winter

storm. The interstate fully reopened Tuesday night after more than a day of blockage.

After a nine-hour trek, Peters got home Tuesday and paid a \$200 bill. But then Peters said Uber added \$400, raising his total bill to \$600. He disputed the additional charge.

In a statement sent to The Associated Press, Uber said Peters would get his money back.

"We have refunded Mr. Peters after this terrible ordeal and are so glad that he and his Uber driver got home safely," according to the statement, which also said that the driver's pay will not be affected.

According to Uber's website, "heavy traffic may cause your trip to take longer than expected and to compensate your driver for the additional time, your fare may change."

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categories with substantial price increases continued to climb."

"The minutes ... reflected policymakers' rising discomfort with elevated inflation and stronger confidence in the recovery of the economy and the labor market despite the downside risks due to the Omicron variant," Kathy Bostjancic, chief U.S. financial economist at Oxford Economics, said in a research note.

With inflation worsening and unemployment falling more quickly than many economists expected, Fed Chair Jerome Powell said after the Dec. 14-15 meeting that the central bank was accelerating the re-

Uber rider refunded \$600 bill after interstate shutdown

RICHMOND, Va. (AP)—A Richmond man has been refunded the \$600 he was charged for an Uber ride that became trapped with hundreds of others on an icy stretch of Interstate 95 in Virginia.

Andrew Peters was returning from San Francisco and did not understand the severity of the situation when he took an Uber from Dulles International Airport on Monday and got stuck in the traffic disaster, WTOP-FM reported.

"It was kind of scary," Peters said. "We didn't have any food or water."

Hundreds of motorists were stranded in freezing temperatures along a 40-mile (64-kilometer) stretch of I-95. Police said part of the road became impassable when tractor-trailers jackknifed in a winter

storm. The interstate fully reopened Tuesday night after more than a day of blockage.

After a nine-hour trek, Peters got home Tuesday and paid a \$200 bill. But then Peters said Uber added \$400, raising his total bill to \$600. He disputed the additional charge.

In a statement sent to The Associated Press, Uber said Peters would get his money back.

"We have refunded Mr. Peters after this terrible ordeal and are so glad that he and his Uber driver got home safely," according to the statement, which also said that the driver's pay will not be affected.

According to Uber's website, "heavy traffic may cause your trip to take longer than expected and to compensate your driver for the additional time, your fare may change."

Atkins Kroll showcases all-new 2022 Toyota Tundra

TAMUNING, Guam—Atkins Kroll unveiled the all-new 2022 Toyota Tundra during a private launch in the Toyota Showroom Wednesday afternoon. A small audience caught a first glimpse of the completely redesigned and most advanced Tundra to date.

The all-new 2022 Toyota Tundra is the third generation of its namesake and is ready to make a big impression in the full-size truck segment this year. The 2022 Toyota Tundra is born from a pedigree of trucks and SUVs rooted in quality, durability, and reliability.

It comes as no surprise that the all-new Tundra was redesigned from the ground up. It comes with i-Force 3.5L twin-turbo V6 engine with 389 horsepower and 479 lb.-ft of torque. Most notable improvements and enhancements include a molded composite never rust bed with aluminum reinforcement, available remove tail



Atkins Kroll unveiled the all-new 2022 Toyota Tundra during a private launch in the Toyota Showroom Wednesday afternoon. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

gate release, and its new fully boxed steel frame and multi-link rear suspension—all designed to give the new Tundra a towing capacity of up to 12,000 lbs.

The bold exterior styling complements the spacious, well-equipped interior, which hosts Apple Car Play

and Android Auto, a 14-inch audio multimedia touchscreen with Back-up Guide and Straight Path Assist. The Tundra comes standard with Toyota Safety Sense 2.5 featuring pre-collision system with pedestrian detection, full-speed range dynamic radar cruise control, lane de-

parture alert, and automatic high beams.

The 2022 Toyota Tundra is available at Atkins Kroll in limited quantities. Pre-orders are available by visiting www.akguam.com and completing the Pre-Order Form at the top of the homepage.

AK Signature Care is Introduced

Atkins Kroll also introduced the all-new AK Signature Care Program. The program provides up to three years free service for all new and used AK vehicle brands. AK Signature Care is included at no extra charge and buyers have the option to upgrade to a five-year plan. The program is designed to help vehicle owners keep a well-maintained vehicle. The service is based on the manufacturer's suggested maintenance recommendations. More information is available at www.akguam.com as well as AK's social media pages. **(PR)**

Nation

US hospitals seeing different kind of COVID surge this time

By RODRIQUE NGOWI, MICHAEL CASEY & DON THOMPSON
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hospitals across the U.S. are feeling the wrath of the omicron variant and getting thrown into disarray that is different from earlier COVID-19 surges.

This time, they are dealing with serious staff shortages because so many health care workers are getting sick with the fast-spreading variant. People are showing up at emergency rooms in large numbers in hopes of getting tested for COVID-19, putting more strain on the system. And a surprising share of patients—two-thirds in some places—are testing positive while in the hospital for other reasons.

At the same time, hospitals say the patients aren't as sick as those who came in during the last surge. Intensive care units aren't as full, and ventilators aren't needed as much as they were before.

The pressures are nevertheless prompting hospitals to scale back non-emergency surgeries and close wards, while National Guard troops have been sent in in several states to help at medical centers and testing sites.

Nearly two years into the pandemic, frustration and exhaustion are running high among health care workers.

"This is getting very tiring, and I'm being very polite in



Registered nurse Rachel Chamberlin, of Cornish, N.H., right, steps out of an isolation room where Fred Rutherford, of Claremont, N.H., left, recovers from COVID-19 at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, in Lebanon, N.H., Monday, Jan. 3, 2022.

saying that," said Dr. Robert Glasgow of University of Utah Health, which has hundreds of workers out sick or in isolation.

About 85,000 Americans are in the hospital with COVID-19, just short of the delta-surge peak of about 94,000 in early September, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The all-time high during the pandemic was about 125,000 in January of last year.

But the hospitalization numbers do not tell the whole story. Some cases in the official count involve COVID-19 infections

that weren't what put the patients in the hospital in the first place.

Dr. Fritz François, chief of hospital operations at NYU Langone Health in New York City, said about 65% of patients admitted to that system with COVID-19 recently were primarily hospitalized for something else and were incidentally found to have the virus.

At two large Seattle hospitals over the past two weeks, three-quarters of the 64 patients testing positive for the coronavirus were admitted with a primary diagnosis other than

COVID-19.

Joanne Spetz, associate director of research at the Healthforce Center at the University of California, San Francisco, said the rising number of cases like that is both good and bad.

The lack of symptoms shows vaccines, boosters and natural immunity from prior infections are working, she said. The bad news is that the numbers mean the coronavirus is spreading rapidly, and some percentage of those people will wind up needing hospitalization.

This week, 36% of California hospitals reported critical

staffing shortages. And 40% are expecting such shortages.

Some hospitals are reporting as much as one quarter of their staff out for virus-related reasons, said Kiyomi Burchill, the California Hospital Association's vice president for policy and leader on pandemic matters.

In response, hospitals are turning to temporary staffing agencies or transferring patients out.

University of Utah Health plans to keep more than 50 beds open because it doesn't

have enough nurses. It is also rescheduling surgeries that aren't urgent. In Florida, a hospital temporarily closed its maternity ward because of staff shortages.

In Alabama, where most of the population is unvaccinated, UAB Health in Birmingham put out an urgent request for people to go elsewhere for COVID-19 tests or minor symptoms and stay home for all but true emergencies. Treatment rooms were so crowded that some patients had to be evaluated in hallways and closets.

California to extend indoor mask mandate until mid-February

LOS ANGELES (AP)—California's indoor mask mandate was extended into mid-February to help prevent the astonishing spike in coronavirus cases from overwhelming hospitals but the state's health director said Wednesday additional restrictions are not being considered.

The fast-spreading omicron variant of COVID-19 is sidelining exposed or infected health care workers, leading to hospital staffing shortages that could become a bigger problem.

"We are and continue to be concerned about our hospitals," said Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly. "Some facilities are going to be strapped."

California's confirmed cases have shot up nearly 500% in the last two weeks and hospitalizations have doubled since Christmas to more than 8,000.

8 children, 2 mothers among dead in Philadelphia house fire

PHILADELPHIA (AP)—Two sisters and several of their children were among the 12 people killed when a fire tore through a Philadelphia rowhome that apparently had no working smoke detectors, fire officials said.

Eight children lost their lives in the Wednesday morning blaze—the city's deadliest single fire in more than a century.

At least two people were hospitalized and some others managed to escape from the three-story brick duplex, which was public housing, officials said. The cause of the fire has not been determined. Officials said 26 people had been staying in the two apartments.

"I knew some of those kids—I used to see them playing on the corner," said Dannie McGuire, 34, fighting back tears as she and Martin Burgert, 35, stood in the doorway of a

home around the corner.

"I can't picture how more people couldn't get out—jumping out a window," she said.

Officials did not release the names or ages of those killed in the blaze, which started before 6:30 a.m.

Family members on Facebook have identified two of the victims as sisters Rosalee McDonald, 33, and Virginia Thomas, 30. The siblings each had multiple children but it's unclear if all of them were home at the time of the fire or how many of them died. Messages were left with several people who said they knew or were related to the victims.

Fire officials initially said 13 people died, seven of them children, but those figures were updated Wednesday evening. Eight children and four adults were found dead, officials said.



ACROSS THE NATION

US, Germany say Russia poses 'urgent' challenge to stability

WASHINGTON (AP)—The United States and Germany said Wednesday that Russia's military buildup near Ukraine's border poses an "immediate and urgent challenge" to European security and that any intervention will draw severe consequences. But the country's top diplomats left open what those consequences would be and how differences on arming Ukraine and a controversial Russian gas pipeline will be resolved. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock sought to present a unified front on Russia after a meeting in Washington. "Both Germany and the United States see Russia's actions toward Ukraine as an immediate and urgent challenge to peace and stability in Europe," Blinken said.

Virginia officials defend response to snowy gridlock on I-95

RICHMOND, Va. (AP)—Virginia officials defending their response to a blizzard that stranded hundreds of motorists along a major interstate highway said conditions for the gridlock were caused by a combination of unusually heavy snowfall, plunging temperatures and a rainy start that kept them from pretreat-

ing the roads. There were no reported deaths or injuries from the calamity on Interstate 95, one of the nation's busiest highways, but plenty of outrage from motorists, some of whom were stranded overnight Monday into Tuesday, posting pleas for help on social media. "We all need to be clear that this was an incredibly unusual event," Gov. Ralph Northam said at a news conference, adding that he could understand drivers' "frustration and fear."

No deal, no school: Chicago cancels classes for a 2nd day

CHICAGO (AP)—Chicago school leaders canceled classes for a second straight day after failing to reach an agreement Wednesday with the teachers union over remote learning and other COVID-19 safety protocols in the nation's third-largest school district. The Chicago Teachers Union, which voted to revert to online instruction, told teachers to stay home Wednesday during the latest COVID-19 surge while both sides negotiate, prompting district officials to cancel classes two days after students returned from winter break. Chicago Public Schools, like most other districts, has rejected returning to remote learning, saying it worsened racial inequities and was detrimental to academic perfor-

mance, mental health and attendance. District officials insist schools can safely remain open with protocols in place. School districts nationwide have grappled with the same issues, with most opting to stay open while ramping up virus testing, tweaking protocols and other adjustments in response to the shifting pandemic.

Spike in California virus cases hitting hospitals, schools

LOS ANGELES (AP)—California is struggling to staff hospitals and classrooms as an astonishing spike in coronavirus infections sweeps through the state. The fast-spreading omicron variant of COVID-19 is sidelining exposed or infected health care workers even as hospital beds fill with patients and "some facilities are going to be strapped," Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly said Wednesday. Some 40% of hospitals are expecting to face critical staff shortages and some are reporting as much as one quarter of their staff out for virus-related reasons, said Kiyomi Burchill of the California Hospital Association. In Fresno County, more than 300 workers at area hospitals were either isolating because of exposure or recovering, said Dan Lynch, the county's emergency medical services director.

Asia

NKorea claims second successful test of hypersonic missile

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—North Korea claimed Thursday to have conducted the second successful test flight of a hypersonic missile, days after leader Kim Jong Un vowed to bolster his military forces despite pandemic-related difficulties.

Wednesday's launch, the North's first known weapons test in about two months, indicates the country will press ahead with plans to modernize its nuclear and missile arsenals rather than return to disarmament talks anytime soon.

The official Korean Central News Agency said the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party expressed "great satisfaction" at the results of the missile test, which was observed by leading weapons officials.

Hypersonic weapons, which fly at speeds in excess of Mach 5, or five times the speed of sound, could pose crucial challenges to missile defense systems because of their speed and maneuverability. It's unclear whether and how soon North Korea could manufacture such a high-tech missile, but it was among a wish-list of sophisticated military assets that Kim disclosed early last year, along with a multi-warhead missile, spy satellites, solid-fueled long-range missiles and underwater-launched nuclear missiles.

Wednesday's test was the second of its kind since North Korea first launched a hyper-



This photo provided by the North Korean government, shows what it says a test launch of a hypersonic missile in North Korea Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022. Independent journalists were not given access to cover the event depicted in this image distributed by the North Korean government. The content of this image is as provided and cannot be independently verified. Korean language watermark on image as provided by source reads: "KCNA" which is the abbreviation for Korean Central News Agency.

KOREAN CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY/KOREA NEWS SERVICE VIA AP

sonic missile last September.

"The successive successes in the test launches in the hypersonic missile sector have strategic significance in that they hasten a task for modernizing strategic armed force of the state," a KCNA dispatch said.

The word "strategic" implies the missile is being developed to deliver nuclear weapons.

KCNA said the missile made a 120-kilometer-long (75 mile) lateral movement before hitting a target 700 ki-

lometers (435 miles) away. It said the test reconfirmed the flight control and stability of the missile and verified its fuel capsule under the winter weather conditions.

While North Korea appears to have made progress in the development of a hypersonic missile, it still needs more test flights to determine whether it meets its tactical objectives or how advanced a hypersonic weapon it could develop, said Lee Choon Geun, an expert and honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and

Technology Policy Institute.

A photo of the launch shows that the upper parts of the missiles launched in September and this week have different shapes. Lee said this suggests that North Korea is testing two versions of warheads for a missile still under development or it is actually developing two different types of hypersonic missiles.

He said the missile's reported lateral movement would provide the weapon with a greater maneuverability to evade enemy missile defense systems.

ASIA BRIEFS

Toxic gas leak from industrial tanker kills 6 in India

NEW DELHI (AP)—A toxic gas leak from an industrial tanker killed at least six people on Thursday in western India, police said. Another 25 people were hospitalized after they inhaled the gas in an industrial complex in Surat, a city in Gujarat state, said police officer Mahesh Patel. The Times-Now news website reported that the gas leak occurred while the driver was trying to dump some waste in a drain from the parked tanker. Those affected were working or sleeping in a nearby factory. Other details were not immediately available.

US Forces in Japan ordered to wear masks as COVID cases jump

TOKYO (AP)—The U.S. military on Thursday ordered personnel stationed in Japan to wear masks when going off base to curb the spread of COVID-19 infections. American forces have come under fire after a recent spike in coronavirus cases in areas where they are based in large numbers, including Okinawa and Iwakuni, both in southern Japan. Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki sent a request to Japan's national government on Thursday asking for permission for the prefecture to strengthen its anti-COVID measures. At least 980 people, a daily record for Okinawa, tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday. In December, there were zero new cases on some days.

Xi'an hospital punished for refusing entry to pregnant woman

BEIJING (AP)—Hospital officials in the northern Chinese city of Xi'an have been punished after a pregnant woman miscarried after being refused entry, reportedly for not having current COVID-19 test results. The city government announced Thursday that Gaoxin Hospital General Manager Fan Yuhui has been suspended and the heads of the outpatient department and medical department sacked. A government statement said the incident had "caused widespread concern in society and caused a severe social impact." The woman waited outside the hospital on a pink plastic stool on New Year's Day until she started bleeding. In a video taken by her husband that was circulated widely, a pool of blood was visible by her feet.

Indonesian prosecutors seek life for Bali bombing suspect

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP)—Indonesian prosecutors on Wednesday demanded a life sentence for a top terror suspect who eluded capture for 18 years and accused him of masterminding a series of deadly attacks in the world's most populous Muslim nation. Aris Sumarsono, 58, whose real name is Arif Sunarso but is better known as Zulkarnaen, sat impassively as the prosecution announced the sentencing demand before a panel of three judges in East Jakarta District Court in a session that was held remotely due to the coronavirus pandemic. Police and prosecutors say Zulkarnaen is the former military commander of Jemaah Islamiyah, a Southeast Asian militant group with ties to al-Qaida. The group is widely blamed for attacks including the 2002 bombings on the Indonesian resort island of Bali that killed 202 people, mostly foreign tourists, as well as attacks in the Philippines.

Australia's COVID numbers surge amid Djokovic fallout

SYDNEY (AP)—Australia saw another day of rising COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations on Thursday amid fears that changes to testing requirements could mask the full scale of the outbreak. The country reported 72,000 cases, up from 64,000 a day earlier, while hospitalizations jumped to 3,267 from 2,990 and patients in intensive care rose to 208 from 196. Victoria state recorded six deaths and 21,997 new cases, the biggest daily jump in cases since the pandemic began. Queensland reported more than 10,000 cases as health officials warned that many more undetected cases were likely spreading in the community. New South Wales saw 34,994 new cases, slightly down from the record number of 35,054 on Wednesday. A double-vaccinated man in his 20s was among six deaths reported Thursday in Australia's most populous state.

Man reunites with family after decades with help of a map

BEIJING (AP)—Since he was a child, Li Jingwei did not know his real name. He did not know where he was born, or for certain how old he was—until he found his biological family last month with the help of a long-remembered map.

Li was a victim of child trafficking. In 1989 when he was 4 years old, a bald neighbor lured him away by saying they would go look at cars, which were rare in rural villages.

That was the last time he saw his home, Li said. The neighbor took him behind a hill to a road where three bicycles and four other kidnappers were waiting. He cried, but they put him on a bike and rode away.

"I wanted to go home but they didn't allow that," Li said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Two hours later, I knew I wouldn't be going back home and I must have met bad people."

He remembers being taken on a train. Eventually he was sold to a family in another province, Henan.

"Because I was too young, only 4, and I hadn't gone to school yet, I couldn't remember anything, including the names" of his parents and hometown, he said.

Etched in his memory, however, was the landscape of his village in the southwestern city of Zhaotong, Yunnan province. He remembered the mountains, bamboo forest, a pond next to his home—all the places he used to play.

After his abduction, Li said he drew maps of his village every day until he was 13 so he wouldn't forget. Before he reached school age, he would draw them on the ground, and after entering school he drew them in notebooks. It became an obsession, he said.

More than 30 years after his abduction, a meticulous drawing of his village landscape helped police locate it and track down his biological mother and siblings.

He was inspired to look for his biological family after two reunions made headlines last

year. In July, a Chinese father, Guo Gangtang, was reunited with his son after searching for 24 years, and in December, Sun Haiyang was reunited with his kidnapped son after 14 years.

Reports of child abductions occur regularly in China, though how often they happen is unclear. The problem is aggravated by restrictions that until 2015 allowed most urban couples only one child.

Li decided to speak with his adoptive parents for clues and consulted DNA databases, but nothing turned up. Then he found volunteers who suggested he post a video of himself on Douyin, a social media platform, along with the map he drew from memory.

It took him only 10 minutes to redraw what he had drawn hundreds, perhaps thousands of times as a child, he said.

That post received tens of thousands of views. By then, Li said police had already narrowed down locations based on his DNA sample, and his

hand-drawn map helped villagers identify a family.

Li finally connected with his mother over the telephone. She asked about a scar on his chin which she said was caused by a fall from a ladder.

"When she mentioned the scar, I knew it was her," Li said.

Other details and recollections fell into place, and a DNA test confirmed his heritage. In an emotional reunion on New Year's Day, he saw his mother for the first time since he was 4.

As Li walked toward her, he collapsed on the ground in emotion. Lifted up by his younger brother and sister, he finally hugged his mother.

Li choked when speaking about his father, who has passed away. Now the father of two teenage children, Li said he will take his family to visit his father's grave with all his aunts and uncles during Lunar New Year celebrations next month.

"It's going to be a real big reunion," he said. "I want to tell him that his son is back."

World

West: Syria must answer 20 questions on its chemical weapons

UNITED NATIONS (AP)—Western nations accused Syria on Wednesday of refusing for eight years to clear up 20 outstanding issues about its undeclared research, production and possible weaponization of

unknown quantities of chemical weapons.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the U.N. Security Council the world “should not be fooled by Syria’s veneer of coop-

eration” while it deliberately delays and obstructs answers to the international chemical weapons watchdog.

France’s U.N. Ambassador Nicolas De Riviere went further, saying Syria is not only

not cooperating with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons but it has continued to use chemical weapons. “And these facts must be qualified as crimes against humanity,” he said.

Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention in September 2013, pressed by its close ally Russia after a deadly chemical weapons attack that the West blamed on Damascus. A Security Council resolution adopted at that time endorsed the decision of the OPCW, which implements the convention, to destroy Syria’s chemical weapons program and banned Syria’s use, development, production or acquisition of chemical weapons.

By August 2014, Syrian President Bashar Assad’s government declared that the destruction of its chemical weapons was completed, but Syria’s initial declaration of its chemical stockpiles and chemical weapons production sites to the OPCW has remained in dispute.

U.N. disarmament chief Izumi Nakamitsu told the council Wednesday that 20 of the 24 outstanding issues in the declaration opened by the OPCW in 2014 remain unresolved. They not only include the undeclared production and possible weaponization of toxic chemicals but the unknown whereabouts

of significant quantities of chemical warfare agents and munitions.

Nakamitsu said the OPCW also has not received a requested declaration on undeclared nerve agents produced at a former chemical weapons facility that Syria declared “as never having been used to produce and/or weaponize chemical warfare agents,” and other requested information.

She called on Syria to respond to the organization’s requests “as soon as possible” and to allow all members of its team analyzing the declaration “unfettered access,” citing the government’s refusal to grant a visa to one member.

Last June, OPCW chief Fernando Arias told the council its experts investigated 77 allegations against Syria and concluded that in 17 cases chemical weapons were likely or definitely used. He called it “a disturbing reality” that eight years after Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, many questions remain about its initial declaration of its weapons, stockpiles and precursors, and its ongoing program.

Russia-led alliance sending peacekeepers to Kazakhstan



Riot police block a street to prevent demonstrators during a protest in Almaty, Kazakhstan, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022.

AP

MOSCOW (AP)—A Russia-led military alliance said Thursday that it will dispatch peacekeeping forces to Kazakhstan after the country’s president asked for help in controlling protests that escalated into violence, including the seizure and setting afire of government buildings.

Protesters in Kazakhstan’s largest city stormed the presidential residence and the mayor’s office Wednesday and set both on fire, according to news reports, as demonstrations sparked by a rise in fuel prices escalated sharp-

ly in the Central Asian nation. Police reportedly fired on some protesters at the residence in Almaty before fleeing. They have clashed repeatedly with demonstrators in recent days, deploying water cannons in the freezing weather, and firing tear gas and concussion grenades.

The Kazakh Interior Ministry said eight police officers and national guard members were killed in the unrest and more than 300 were injured. No figures on civilian casualties were released.

President Kassym-Jomart

Tokayev appealed to the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Moscow-based alliance of six former Soviet countries, for assistance. Hours later, the CSTO’s council approved sending an unspecified number of peacekeepers, said Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, the council’s chairman.

Tokayev earlier vowed to take harsh measures to quell the unrest and declared a two-week state of emergency for the whole country, expanding one that had been announced

for both the capital of Nur-Sultan and the largest city of Almaty that imposed an overnight curfew and restricted movement into and around the urban areas.

The government resigned in response over the unrest. Kazakh news sites became inaccessible late in the day, and the global watchdog organization Netblocks said the country was experiencing a pervasive internet blackout. The Russian news agency Tass reported that internet access was restored in Almaty by early Thursday.

France allows some COVID-19-infected medics to keep working

LE PECQ, France (AP)—France is allowing health care workers who are infected with the coronavirus but have few or no symptoms to keep treating patients rather than self-isolate, an extraordinary stopgap measure aimed at easing staff shortages at hospitals and other facilities caused by an unprecedented explosion in cases.

The special exemption to France’s quarantine rules being rolled out to hospitals, elderly care homes, doctors’ offices and other essential health services testifies to the growing strain on the French medical system by the fast-spreading omicron variant.

It is a calculated risk, with the possibility that health care workers with COVID-19 could infect colleagues and patients being weighed against what the government says is a need to keep essential services running.

Outside the health sector, for those not covered by the special exemption, France’s quarantine rules require at least five days of self-isolation for the fully vaccinated who test positive. For the unvaccinated, self-isolation is at least seven days.

Governments and industries have warned that isola-

tion rules are creating staff shortages across a range of sectors as the omicron variant causes surges in infections in many countries. In some places, quarantines have been shortened, including France, to get workers back to their posts.

But in Europe, France appears to be alone in now also opening up the possibility for health care personnel to work while infected.

There are increasing signs that the variant causes less-severe disease. But the deluge of infections is still sending increasing numbers of people to hospitals, putting those institutions under pressure, especially when medical workers are absent, too.

French hospital authorities said the new flexibility from self-isolation would help them plug staffing holes if and when they open up.

“If the system becomes very strained and 50% of our staff are positive, the less symptomatic will come to work because the patients will still need to be cared for,” said Dr. Marc Leone, head of anesthesiology at the North Hospital in the southern city of Marseille.

“But we’re not in that situation yet,” he said.

Italy requires coronavirus vaccines for people 50 and older

ROME (AP)—The Italian government approved a measure Wednesday requiring people older than 50 to be vaccinated against the coronavirus, as the country struggles with nearly daily new records of fresh infections fueled by the omicron variant.

Earlier in the day, 189,000 new infections were confirmed in the country of some 59 million people.

“We want to put the brakes on the growth of the curve of contagion and push Italians who are still not vaccinated to do so,” Prime Minister Mario

Draghi was quoted by an official in his office as telling his ministers at a Cabinet meeting Wednesday evening.

The Cabinet voted unanimously to impose the mandate, which Public Administration Minister Renato Brunetta said puts Italy in the vanguard in Europe in cracking down on those who refuse to be vaccinated and who now account for the majority of patients in Italy’s rapidly filling ICU beds.

Some 78% of Italy’s population is fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, which

can cause COVID-19. So far, about 36% have received a booster shot, which experts say is a crucial instrument in reducing the possibility that an infection will necessitate intensive care or be fatal.

Draghi said the decision to require vaccination for older persons was taken out of concern that they are at more risk for hospitalization and “to reduce the pressure on hospitals and save lives.”

It was not immediately announced what if any penalty non-vaccinated older persons might face. But Health Min-

ister Roberto Speranza told reporters that anyone 50 or older will be checked to see if they have a “super green pass” before they enter their workplaces. That certification is reserved to those who are fully vaccinated or who have recently recovered from COVID-19.

The workplace requirement for older workers in both the public or private sector takes effect Feb. 15. That date would presumably allow time for workers to become fully vaccinated if they aren’t now.

Off The Wall

‘Follow me’: Dog finds help, leads cops to owner’s car crash

LEBANON, N.H. (AP)—A German shepherd named Tinsley, first thought to be a lost dog, successfully led New Hampshire state police to the site of its owner’s rollover crash.

Both the vehicle’s occupants were seriously hurt, but thanks

to Tinsley’s dogged efforts they quickly received medical assistance once officers discovered the truck, which went off the road near a Vermont interstate junction, WMUR-TV reported Tuesday.

“The dog was trying to

show them something,” said Lt. Daniel Baldassarre of the New Hampshire State Police. “He kept trying to get away from them but didn’t run away totally.

“It was kind of, ‘Follow me. Follow me.’ And they did

that and you know, to their surprise to see the guardrail damaged and to look down to where the dog is looking at, it’s just, they were almost in disbelief,” he said.

A New Hampshire state trooper and police from the

nearby city of Lebanon responded to the crash site late Monday, just across the state line in Vermont.

There were no further details on the condition of those injured in the single-vehicle crash.

Treasure hunters sue for records on FBI’s Civil War gold dig

Treasure hunters who believe they found a huge cache of fabled Civil War-era gold in Pennsylvania are now on the prowl for something as elusive as the buried booty itself: government records of the FBI’s excavation.

Finders Keepers filed a federal lawsuit against the Justice Department over its failure to produce documents on the FBI’s search for the legendary gold, which took place nearly four years ago at a remote woodland site in northwestern Pennsylvania.

The FBI has since dragged its feet on the treasure hunters’ Freedom of Information Act request for records, their lawyer said Wednesday.

“There’s been a pattern of behavior by the FBI that’s been very troubling,” said



AP

This Sept. 20, 2018 file photo, Dennis Parada, right, and his son Kem Parada stand at the site of the FBI’s dig for Civil War-era gold in Dents Run, Pa.

Anne Weismann, who represents Finders Keepers. She questioned whether the agency is “acting in good faith.”

A message was sent to the

Justice Department seeking comment on the suit, which asks a judge to order the FBI to immediately turn over the records.

Finders Keepers’ owners, the father-son duo of Dennis and Kem Parada, had spent years looking for what, according to legend, was an 1863 shipment of Union gold that was lost or stolen on its way to the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia. The duo focused on a spot where they say their instruments detected a large metallic mass.

After meeting with the treasure hunters in early 2018, the FBI brought in a contractor with more sophisticated instruments. The contractor detected an underground mass that weighed up to nine tons and had the density of gold, according to an FBI affidavit unsealed last year at the request of news organizations, including The Associated Press.

The Paradases accompanied the FBI to the site in Dent’s Run, about 135 miles (220 kilometers) northeast of Pittsburgh, but say they were confined to their car while the FBI excavated.

The FBI has long insisted the March 2018 dig came up empty, but the agency has consistently stymied the Paradases’ efforts to obtain information.

The FBI initially claimed it had no files about the investigation. Then, after the Justice Department ordered a more thorough review, the FBI said its records were exempt from public disclosure. Finally, in the wake of the treasure hunters’ appeal, the FBI said it had located 2,400 pages of records and 17 video files that it could potentially turn over—but that it would take years to do so.

OFFBEAT BRIEFS

Holiday gifts taken from luggage, replaced with dog food

PORTSMOUTH, N.H. (AP)—A woman who returned from a flight to Europe with more than \$3,000 worth of gifts in her luggage found the contents gone—and replaced with dog food. Gina Sheldon, of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, also found an old T-shirt and a shaving cream bottle in her bag, WMUR-TV reported Friday. “There was a leather jacket I had purchased for my 16-year-old,” Sheldon said. I had bought these really cute leather wristlet band purses that I had bought to give to various family and friends.” Sheldon said she spent 11 days in Italy and stopped in Paris for a few days for business on her way home recently. Sheldon booked her flight through Delta Air Lines, but it was operated by Air France.


Dogs to visit 3 school districts to sniff out COVID-19

BOSTON (AP)—Two dogs trained to detect an odor distinct to people who are sick with COVID-19 will visit three school districts in Bristol County this week. A black Labrador named Huntah and a golden Lab called Duke can detect the smell of the virus on surfaces and will sit to indicate

when they pick up the scent. The dogs will visit schools in the Freetown, Lakeville and Norton school districts, WBZ-TV reported Tuesday. “With COVID, whether it’s the omicron, whether it’s the delta, our dogs will hit on it,” said Bristol County Capt. Paul Douglas. “And if there’s a new variant that comes out in six months, hopefully there isn’t, but if there is one, COVID is COVID.”

Backfiring car causes active shooter scare at movie theater

DAVIE, Fla. (AP)—The sound of a car backfiring near a South Florida movie theater led police to evacuate moviegoers following multiple reports of an active shooter, authorities said. The incident happened Sunday night at the Cinemax movie theater in Davie. Davie police later told news outlets that a passing vehicle’s engine likely backfired, prompting the scare. “The movie cut out, the alarms went off, the intercoms said, ‘Hey, everyone please leave the movie theatres,’” Jonathan Fernandez told WPLG. “And then I followed everyone out of the movie theaters. Everyone was in a little bit of a panic.” Police officers went theater-to-theater inside the complex and found no signs of a shooter, officials said.



Commonwealth Utilities Corporation

JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

JVA No. 22 – 039

Opening Date: January 6, 2022
Closing Date: January 20, 2022

<p>POSITION TITLE:</p> <p>DEPARTMENT:</p> <p>LOCATION:</p> <p>ANNUAL SALARY:</p> <p>CONTRACT:</p> <p>POSITION(S):</p>	<p>Trades Assistant</p> <p>Wastewater Division</p> <p>Saipan, Northern Marianas Islands, USA</p> <p>\$16,742.00 to \$22,602.00 per annum, Non- Exempt</p> <p>Not Contracted</p> <p>Two(2)</p>
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The incumbent will be under the overall supervision of the Drinking Water & Wastewater Division Manager or his/her designee. This class specification represents only the core areas of responsibilities; specific position assignments will vary depending on the needs of the Wastewater Division.

Duties:

- The Trades Assistant assists with installations, repairs and general maintenance in assigned service area; operates motorized vehicles, equipment machinery, and hand and power tools.
- Performs routine and preventative maintenance on equipment, vehicles, systems and/or infrastructure; performs basic inspections; and conducts basic troubleshooting of issues.
- Responds to trouble calls as needed.
- Prepares job site for work including gathering and setting up materials and supplies, and setting work safety barriers for protection and to direct traffic flow away from work site.
- Gathers, cleans and returns equipment, materials and supplies used.
- Cleans and maintains work site after project or repair work is complete.
- Monitors equipment; takes readings and collects data; documents equipment readings; prepares and submits data and work reports.
- Performs inventory spot checks to ensure adequate materials and supplies are available for daily maintenance activities.
- Performing daily well and pump station facility maintenance, cleaning and monitoring;
- Assisting plumbing and chlorine maintenance crew;
- Utilizing digging equipment for locating and repairing leaks;
- Repairing and securing pressure reducer valves, main valves, service lines and laterals, and booster pumps;
- Assisting with meter installation and repair;
- Collecting water samples;
- Performs other duties of a similar nature and level as assigned.

Minimum Requirements:
Education: High School Diploma, General Education Diploma, or Adult Basic Education.
Knowledge of: Customer service principles; Basic mathematical concepts; Safety procedures and safe work practices; Modern office technology.
Skills in: Providing customer service; Reading maps and drawings; Operating heavy and light equipment machinery, hand and power tools required of assigned area; Adhering to safety procedures and safe work practices; Prioritizing tasks and managing time for efficiency; Identifying issues and solving problems; Providing attention to detail; Taking equipment readings and recording data; Maintaining activity logs and reports; Utilizing a computer and relevant software applications; Utilizing communication and interpersonal skills as applied to interaction with coworkers, supervisor, the general public, and others to sufficiently exchange or convey information and to receive work direction.

Licensing/Certification:

- Valid U.S. Driver’s License with appropriate class;

All applicants may be tested and all applicants are subject to pre-employment drug test.

How to Apply: You may submit your CUC Employment Application and/or resume at the Human Resources office located on the 3rd Floor of the Joeten Dandan Building on Saipan, from Monday to Friday, 7:30am – 4:30pm. Applicants on the island of Tinian and Rota can drop it off at the Tinian and Rota Administration office. Application and resume can also be e-mailed to: employment.applications@cucgov.org

An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer.

MICHAEL N. EVANGELISTA, ESQ.
(CNMI Bar No. F0364)
LAW OFFICES OF MICHAEL NORITA
EVANGELISTA, LLC
D’ Torres Building, Garapan
P.O. Box 504340, Saipan, MP 96950
Tel: (670) 235-8060; Fax: (670) 235-8070
Email: mnevangelista8@gmail.com

Attorney for Plaintiff

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

BANK OF SAIPAN,

Plaintiff,
-v-

PATRICIA MUÑA ALDAN
and JUAN DELEON
GUERRERO ALDAN,

Defendants.

Civil Action
No. 20-0015

NOTICE OF
AUCTION
ON THE
MORTGAGED
PROPERTY

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that under and by virtue of the judgment dated September 27, 2021, made and entered in the above entitled action by the Superior Court of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, to satisfy the amount found and adjudged due Plaintiff from Defendants, the court-approved auctioneer, Mr. Richard S. Villagomez, will sell at public auction, to the highest bidder, on the 16th day of February, 2022, at 1:30 p.m., at the Law Offices of Michael N. Evangelista, LLC., 2nd Floor, D’ Torres Building, Middle Road, Garapan, Saipan, the premises and real estate, lying and being on Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, described in said judgment, to wit: **Lot 010 K 401**.

Lot 010 K 401, as more particularly described on Drawing/Cadastral Plat No. 010 K 01, the original of which was recorded on August 19, 1987, as Document No. 87-2912 at Commonwealth Recorder’s, Saipan.

Terms and Conditions of Sale.

1. **Rights and duties of Auctioneer.** Consistent with the custom and usage and applicable laws of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands governing auction sales with reserve, the auctioneer shall have the following rights and duties in conducting the auction sale:

- a) withdraw the property listed for sale in the public announcement before sale or before a bid for such property is accepted.
- b) to adjourn the sale without notice at any time before any specific property is sold, without incurring any liability whatsoever thereby; and
- c) to reject any and all bids.

2. **Bids.** Tentative bids may be submitted in advance for the property listed in the notice. Such bids shall not be binding. The highest of such bids will automatically be considered the opening bid for the property, provided it is acceptable as the minimum starting bid to the Bank of Saipan. Bids made in advance must be in writing and addressed to Michael N. Evangelista, Attorney-at-Law, 2nd Floor, D’ Torres Building, Middle Road, Garapan, Saipan, P.O. Box 504340 CK Saipan, MP 96950 or Email: mnevangelista8@gmail.com.

3. **Deposit and Payment.** A deposit of ten percent (10%) of the purchase price must be paid on the day of the auction sale. The remaining balance will be due within five days of the auction sale. All payments must be made by cash, cashier’s check, or money order. Failure to make payment of the remaining balance within five days will result in forfeiture by the buyer of the 10% deposit, and any and all of the buyer’s rights, title and interest in the property will revert to Bank of Saipan.

4. **Change of Terms.** Auctioneer and Bank of Saipan reserve the right to change any of the terms of conduct and enforcement of sale by announcement, written or oral, made before the auction sale or at the commencement thereof, and such change or changes, by virtue of this clause shall be binding on any buyer by constructive notice.

5. **Inspection and No Warranty.** Bidders are cautioned to inspect the title and property. Contact the Law Offices of Michael N. Evangelista, LLC., for scheduled viewing and inspection times. The interests of the property are being sold “AS IS” and without warranty. Failure to inspect the real property will not constitute a ground for any claim, adjustment or rescission by any buyer.

DATED this 7th day of January, 2022.

LAW OFFICES OF MICHAEL NORITA
EVANGELISTA, LLC.

/s/ Michael N. Evangelista
Michael N. Evangelista, Esq.
(Bar No. 0364)
Attorney for Plaintiff

Science & Technology

NASA nails trickiest job on newly launched space telescope

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP)—NASA aced the most complicated, critical job on its newly launched space telescope Tuesday: unrolling and stretching a sunshade the size of a tennis court. Ground controllers cheered and bumped fists once the fifth and final layer of the sunshield was tightly secured. It took just 1 1/2 days to tighten the ultra-thin layers using motor-driven cables, half the expected time.

The 7-ton James Webb Space Telescope is so big that

the sunshield and the primary gold-plated mirror had to be folded for launch. The sunshield is especially unwieldy—it spans 70 feet by 46 feet (21 meters by 14 meters) to keep all the infrared, heat-sensing science instruments in constant subzero shadow.

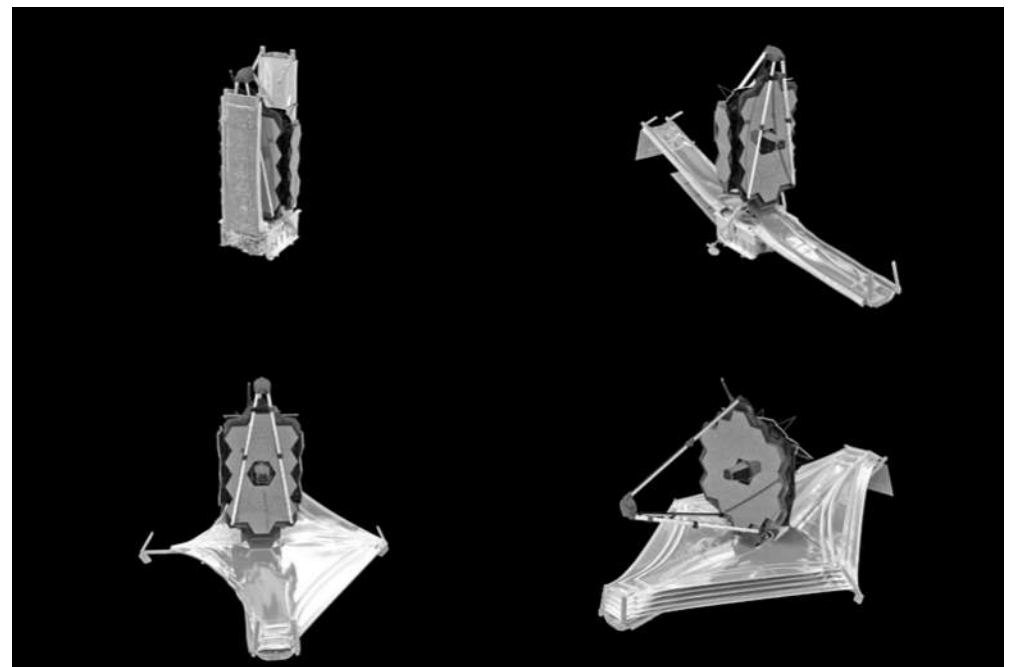
The mirrors are next up for release this weekend.

The \$10 billion telescope is more than halfway toward its destination 1 million miles (1.6 million kilometers) away, following its Christmas Day send-off. It is the biggest and

most powerful observatory ever launched—100 times more powerful than the Hubble Space Telescope—enabling it to peer back to almost the beginning of time.

Considered Hubble's successor, Webb will attempt to hunt down light from the universe's first stars and galaxies, created 13.7 billion years ago.

"This is a really big moment," project manager Bill Ochs told the control team in Baltimore. "We've still got a lot of work to do, but getting the sunshield out and deployed



NASA/GODDARD SPACE FLIGHT CENTER CONCEPTUAL IMAGE LAB VIA AP

This combination of images from a computer animation made available by NASA in December 2021 depicts the unfolding of the components of the James Webb Space Telescope. Webb is so big that it had to be folded origami-style to fit into the nose cone of the Ariane rocket.

is really, really big."

Engineers spent years redoing and tweaking the shade. At one point, dozens of fasteners

fell off during a vibration test.

That made Tuesday's success all the sweeter, since nothing like this had ever been at-

tempted before in space.

"First time and we nailed it," engineer Alphonso Stewart told reporters.

Jake's mice: Searching for answers to the puzzle of autism

ST. LOUIS (AP)—Jake Litvag leaned in for a closer look as a lab mouse scurried around an enclosure, stopping to sniff a large block.

"Hi, Jakob 1. I'm Jake," the 16-year-old said, naming the little furry creature engineered to have the same genetic abnormality he has.

That mouse and its lab-grown relatives are the first in the world to mirror the missing gene that causes Jake's autism. Scientists at Washington University in St. Louis bred the mice, and grew

stem cells derived from Jake's blood, to study and find ways to treat his rare disorder—and look for answers to the larger puzzle of autism.

Jake's family raised money for the early research, which scientists then parlayed into a \$4 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to delve more deeply into Jake's gene, one of more than 100 implicated in autism. They hope to find "points of convergence" that could someday help people with all forms of the neurode-

velopmental condition affecting one in 44 U.S. children.

Jake knows he inspired their work. And that's helped him see autism as something to be proud of rather than something that makes him different from other kids. His parents, Joe and Lisa Litvag, figured meeting the scientists—and the mice—would show him firsthand what he had brought into being. "Oh wow. Cool!" Jake said as he watched a mouse climb down a pole while others scampered in a bin.

Science Matters

Why she tilts her head when you speak to her

Human or other animal behavior that tends to one side or the other often stems from some asymmetry in the nervous system — such as the brain's having two hemispheres.

Because no research has been carried out on dogs' familiar head-tilting behavior, Hungarian scientists conducted a controlled experiment on why they do it.

A test for clever dogs

Some dogs ("gifted learners") very often tilted their head upon hearing the owner's naming and asking for a toy

7 'Gifted learner' dogs

33 'Typical' dogs

Typical dogs rarely learn that behavior

An individual trait: some go left, some go right



MAX tilts right



WHISKY tilts left



GAIA tilts left

What made the dog tilt its head

Among the gifted dogs, the human naming a toy that the dog was trained to recognize would make the dog tilt its head

If the human spoke nonsense words, the gifted dog *did not* tilt its head as it processed the sound

Source: Andrea Sommes of Family Dog Project, Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest); Animal Cognition (journal)
Graphic: Helen Lee McComas, Tribune News Service

© 2021 TNS



These gifted dogs were collie-types — herding breeds well-known for verbal intelligence



TECH Q&A: What's wrong if Wi-Fi is faster than a wired internet connection

Q: I do a lot of videoconferencing on Microsoft Teams and Zoom. I can use either Wi-Fi with a download speed about 80 megabits per second or a wired internet connection that has a download speed of 240 megabits per second. On Wi-Fi I have no problems, but on a wired connection the video sometimes freezes, forcing me to reboot the computer. The only thing unusual about my network is that I have a laptop docking station with two monitors and an external hard disk drive attached. What can I do to make the wired connection work better?

A: A wired internet connection should always be faster than a Wi-Fi connection. But wired connections can be more complicated—for example, yours includes a laptop docking station—and that can slow your internet speed. Here are some ways to speed up a wired connection:

- Restart your computer, network router and internet modem (in some cases the router and modem are a single unit.) This is just the old truism that a reboot fixes most things.

- Try bypassing the docking station and plugging the network cable directly into the computer. The docking station may be flawed, or it may have a software conflict with the computer, either of which can slow down wired internet speeds. You should also update the docking station's firmware (software that's downloaded to a particular device) from the manufacturer's website.

By STEVE ALEXANDER
Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

Steve Alexander covers technology for the Minneapolis Star Tribune. Readers may write to him at Tech Q&A, 425 Portland Ave. S., Minneapolis, Minn. 55488-0002; email: steve.j.alexander@gmail.com. Please include a full name, city and phone number.



- Avoid using two or more computer screens during videoconferencing; it slows down a computer because multiple screen images must be processed at once. The slowdown is worse when two or more screens have different settings for resolution, or sharpness.

- Update Windows (see tinyurl.com/3vr6326j) and update its software drivers (software that connects the computer to its various parts, see tinyurl.com/43hwje7h) for your graphics card and docking station. Also update your router's firmware (check the manufacturer's website).

- Make sure your computer isn't trying to do too many other tasks while you're on a video call. Those other tasks can take computing power away from a videoconference.

- Delete some unneeded data from the Microsoft Teams files that are stored on your computer (see tinyurl.com/3jwu757c).

- If you use an "unmanaged network switch" to add more wired internet plug-ins to your router (see tinyurl.com/ywew27nm), you may be able to upgrade the switch to improve wired videoconfer-

encing. Some users say upgrading to a switch with gigabit-per-second speed will help (see tinyurl.com/4h6cw3wt).

Q: We are using AVG Anti-Virus Free as our main security program. Can we also use the free version of the Malwarebytes security program, or would there be a conflict?

A: AVG AntiVirus Free and the free version of Malwarebytes don't conflict because only one of them (AVG) is running a continuous scan of your computer. The free Malwarebytes only runs if you manually start a scan; it stops running once the scan is complete.

But if you simultaneously run AVG Antivirus Free and the paid version of Malwarebytes there is the potential for interference because both programs run constantly (it's called "real-time scanning"). Even then you might be able to avoid trouble by setting each program to "exclude" the other from its scan of the computer (see tinyurl.com/yckfvhch).

Email tech questions to Steve Alexander at steve.j.alexander@gmail.com. Please include a full name, city and phone number.

Longtime friend brings others along on outings

DEAR ABBY

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.



DEAR ABBY: I have a friend, "Tara," I have known for a long time. Early in our friendship when we made plans, she would bring her boyfriend along (without asking or telling me she was). When she began dating her now-husband, it continued. I did grow to like him and appreciated the chance to get to know him, but I thought it could have been handled better (a planned event where we all hung out occasionally, not her dragging him along to everything we had planned together).

She's married now, and a mother, and now every time we hang out, she brings along her rambunctious 6-year-old. Tara's mother is older and lives with her, and sometimes she comes along with them. I'm the boy's godmother (we are close, he calls me Auntie and I love him dearly) but that doesn't mean I don't want some alone friend time with Tara.

The child is not well-behaved, so taking him out in public isn't always pleasant or easy. I am a planner. I dislike getting railroaded with babysitting when I'm anticipating a fun girls' day out. Tara usually waits until right before we're getting together to say he's coming, changes our plans or waits until she's on the way and says, "I hope it's OK 'Bobby' is coming with me." I find it rude and disrespectful of me and our time together.

I hate to lose a longtime friend, but I never know what I'm getting with her and am now hesitant to make plans with her. What would you do in this situation?

SIMMERING IN SOUTH CAROLINA

DEAR SIMMERING: I would tell my friend that once in a while I don't mind an occasional change of plans, but when I have "a fun girls' day out" planned with her, I don't appreciate what she has been doing. Your feelings are valid.

DEAR ABBY: I have been invited to a wedding. I'm close with the bride and want to attend. However, more than 400 people have been invited, and I'm not comfortable attending an event this large where social distancing will be impossible. While I can try to keep my distance and, of course, wear a mask, the seating cannot be arranged so guests can socially distance.

I'm torn between protecting the health of others and myself, and preserving my friendship because she's a bride in love and I'm worried about hurting her feelings. In our state, gatherings of 100 people are allowed if they are outside and people wear masks and socially distance. She thinks the coronavirus is a hoax and God will have it go away completely by her wedding. I need to RSVP. Please help.

UNEASY IN OREGON

DEAR UNEASY: Tell your friend that you are sorry you will miss her wedding, but that you are not comfortable traveling at this time or being in large groups while the COVID-19 virus is still an issue and the omicron variant is more contagious than delta.

The COVID virus is not a "hoax," and none of us has such a close relationship with the Almighty that He (or She) will make it disappear so a bride can have a large wedding. The bride-to-be is entitled to her opinion, and you are equally entitled to yours, so send your regrets and the reason for them, and do not allow yourself to be sucked into a debate about it.

P.S. A nice wedding gift might "soften" the blow of your absence.

What teens need to know about sex, drugs, AIDS and getting along with peers and parents is in "What Every Teen Should Know." Send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for \$8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Teen Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

Life & Style

Meghan suit nets 1 pound on privacy, secret copyright sum

LONDON (AP)—The Duchess of Sussex will receive a nominal 1-pound (\$1.35) payment for invasion of privacy plus undisclosed damages for copyright infringement, under an agreement that ends her long-running dispute with Britain's Mail on Sunday over the tabloid's publication of a letter she wrote to her father.

The terms were reported by the Guardian newspaper on Wednesday, 10 days after Associated Newspapers Ltd., publisher of the Mail on Sunday, decided to forego further appeals and published a statement acknowledging that the U.S.-born duchess, formerly known as Meghan Markle, had won her lawsuit.

The Mail on Sunday's statement, which appeared Dec. 26, said "financial remedies have been agreed" but provided no details. The undisclosed damages for copyright infringement will be donated to charity. The tabloid will also shoulder legal fees.

The settlement marks the end of a lawsuit filed after the Mail on Sunday published a series of stories in 2019 based on a personal letter Meghan wrote to her estranged father after her marriage to Prince Harry.

"I think they just kind of cut

Italy sending Parthenon fragment to Athens in nudge to UK

ROME (AP)—An Italian museum is lending a fragment of the Parthenon Sculptures to Greece, in what both sides hope will become a permanent return that might encourage others—the British Museum, in particular—to send their own pieces of the works back, too.

Sicily's regional archaeological museum said Wednesday it had signed an agreement with the Acropolis Museum in Athens for a once-renewable, four-year loan of the small white marble piece it has, in exchange for a loan of a statue and vase. But the ultimate aim, Sicily's A. Salinas Archaeological Museum said in a statement, is the "indefinite return" of the fragment to Athens.

About half the surviving 5th century B.C. sculptures that decorated the Parthenon temple on the Acropolis are in the British Museum in London, which has long resisted Greek appeals for their return. But small fragments are also held in other European museums.

"The return to Athens of this important artefact of the Parthenon goes in the direction of building a Europe of culture that has its roots in our history and in our identity," said Sicily's coun-



(AP PHOTO/SETH WENIG, FILE)

Meghan Markle and Prince Harry pose for pictures after visiting the observatory in One World Trade in New York, Sept. 23, 2021.

their losses," said Mark Stephens, a London attorney who wasn't involved in the case, citing the seven-figure legal fees incurred by both sides. "So I think it probably was right of both parties to draw a line in the sand and ... close this particular case."

Meghan, a former actress, sued Associated Newspapers for misuse of private information and copyright infringement.

The newspaper's lawyers

disputed Meghan's claim, arguing that she crafted the letter knowing it might be seen by the news media. Correspondence between Meghan, 40, and her then-communications secretary, Jason Knauf, showed that the duchess suspected her father might leak the letter to journalists and wrote it with that in mind.

After a lower court rejected the Mail's arguments, the newspaper took the case to the Court of Appeal.



(ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM ANTONINO SALINAS VIA AP)

This photo released by Archeological Museum Antonino Salinas on Wednesday Jan. 5, 2022, shows a fragment exposed in the Museum in Palermo, Italy, belonging to a draped figure on the east side of the Parthenon frieze, the temple built between 449 and 438BC on the Acropolis of Athens. An Italian museum is sending a fragment of the Parthenon marbles back to Greece in what both sides hope will be a permanent return that will encourage others—the British Museums, in particular to return its Parthenon statues.

cilor for cultural heritage and identity, Alberto Samonà.

The piece is the right foot of a draped figure of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt, originally located on the eastern side of a 160-meter (520-foot) sculpted frieze that ran around the temple. It came to Palermo by way of a 19th century English consul in Sicily, Robert Fagan, though it remains unknown how he acquired it. After Fagan died, his

widow sold the fragment to the University of Palermo's Regio museum, which became the A. Salinas regional museum, the statement said.

The statement quoted Greek authorities as praising the initiative in the hope that it encourages the British Museum to return its sculptures, which were taken from the Parthenon by Lord Elgin, the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, in the early 19th century.

In the appeal, Associated Newspapers also argued that Meghan made private information public by cooperating with Omid Scobie and Carolyn Durand, authors of "Finding Freedom," a sympathetic book about her and Harry.

The duchess' lawyers had previously denied that she or Harry collaborated with the authors. But Knauf testified that he gave the writers information and discussed it with Harry and Meghan.

Grammys postpone ceremony, citing omicron variant risks

LOS ANGELES (AP)—The Grammy Awards were postponed Wednesday weeks before the planned Los Angeles ceremony over what organizers called "too many risks" from the omicron variant, signaling what could be the start of another year of pandemic upheaval for awards season.

The attempt at a back-to-normal show had been scheduled for Jan. 31st at the newly renamed Crypto.com Arena with a live audience and performances, but no new date is on the books. The Recording Academy said it made the decision to postpone the ceremony "after careful consideration and analysis with city and state officials, health and safety experts, the artist community and our many partners."

"Given the uncertainty surrounding the omicron variant, holding the show on January 31st simply contains too many risks," the academy said in a statement.

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson



Garfield®

By Jim Davis



Adam@home

By Bryan Basset



The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Schlep

4 Family docs

7 Cognizant

12 Mil. address

13 Football's Par-seghian

14 Jail-related

15 Oahu, for one (Abbr.)

16 Separated by a barrier

18 Roulette bet

19 Windy day toys

20 Male deer

22 Pink Floyd's Barrett

23 Clock radio toggle

27 CBS logo

29 Germany's Merkel

31 "SNL" producer Michaels

34 Fund

35 Everest guide

37 Canonized Fr. woman

38 Peace symbol

39 Trim the grass

41 Dimension

45 Leg bone

47 Superman foe Luther

48 Canceled

52 Kimono sash

53 Perpendicular, at sea

54 Greek H

55 Soon-to-be grads

56 Civil rights org.

57 Old map letters

58 Have breakfast

DOWN

1 Hide-aways

2 Surprise win

3 Israel's Meir

4 Stare stupidly

5 Laud

6 Like anchovies

7 Mimics

8 Marry

9 Year in Cancun

10 U.K. military fliers

11 Sprite

17 Spartan queen

21 Category

23 De Mille of dance

24 Club —

25 Mideast org.

26 Gullet

28 "You betcha!"

30 Mosquito barrier

31 "Acid"

32 "So that's it!"

33 Speed (up)

36 During

37 Swallows' cousins

40 Slender wood-winds

42 "You win"

43 Striped equine

44 Be

45 Office part-timer

46 Miles away

48 Fire

49 Lawyers' gp.

50 Salonga of "Miss Saigon"

51 Varnish ingredient

Solution time: 25 mins.

Yesterday's answer 1-7

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Leslie Grace, 27; Robert Sheehan, 34; Nicolas Cage, 58; Katie Couric, 65.

Happy Birthday: Take nothing for granted, and forge ahead with optimism. Don't waste valuable time on things that don't matter. A positive attitude coupled with the desire to make alterations at home consistent with your long-term plans will help you maintain a better quality of life. Tidy up loose ends that stand between you and what you want to achieve. Your numbers are 9, 17, 21, 29, 32, 37, 43.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): You'll face opposition from someone competitive. Don't let anyone disrupt your plan. Keep your eye on what you want to achieve, and put your intelligence and energy into reaching your goal. Distance yourself from high-risk situations and people. ***

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Don't let stubbornness set in when you should be exploring the possibilities. Learn all you can regarding the ins and outs of something that can help you perfect a skill you want to use to your advantage. Change begins with you. ****

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Put one foot in front of the other, and continue to push your way to the front of the line. Use your intelligence and a little brute force until you are happy with the results you achieve. Speak on your behalf, and avoid being misinterpreted. **

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Incorporate your imagination into everything you do, and you'll stand out and make a difference. Don't expect everyone to be on your

side; jealousy will prevail, and it's up to you to stay focused on giving your all and doing your best. *****

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Learn through observation. If you move forward without thinking about consequences, you'll end up having to do things twice. Don't let change throw you off guard. Analyze what's happening, and make the necessary adjustments that offset any chance of failure. ***

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): You can have fun and make an impression without overspending. Be innovative, and you'll develop a cost-efficient plan that will open doors and offer insight into new and exciting possibilities. Don't let negativity stand in your way. ***

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): A disciplined approach to what others expect of you will help you finish what you start. Take better care of your health and home, and it will spare you loss and regret. Take the path that soothes your soul instead of following someone else. ***

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Refuse to let anyone hold you back. Consider what's best for you, and follow through. It's OK to be different and follow your gut feeling. Surround yourself with like-minded individuals, and do what makes you happy. Romance is favored. *****

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Go over every detail. Sharing your thoughts and feelings too soon will backfire. Spend more time observing and less time sharing. Put your time and effort into how best to use

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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your skills to get ahead or make a difference. **

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Follow your interests. Incorporate something you love to do into your daily routine. Work that you enjoy can make your life less stressful. Look into what you need to do to offset negativity and poor decisions. Let go of the past. ****

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Anger will stand between you and what you want to achieve. Refuse to let what others do or say ruffle your feathers. Focus on what you can do to get ahead. Discipline and determination are encouraged. ***

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Turn your dreams into a reality. Don't let what others do anger you. Instead, put your energy where it counts, and concentrate on whatever it takes to achieve happiness. If you can imagine it, you can incorporate it into your life. ***

Birthday Baby: You are unique, creative and attractive. You are instinctual and responsive.

☾: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ☼: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ☼☼: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ☼☼☼: Aim high; start new projects. ☼☼☼☼: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

STUMPED?

For answers to today's crossword, call 1-800-226-5955! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku By Dave Green

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

Difficulty Level ★★★★★

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WONDERWORD® By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them. Circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

INDIAN VEGETARIAN MEALS

Solution: 12 letters

C C A C H I C K P E A S B N O
A H T L S N I M U C A R R O T
L E I O W R O T I O L E E I A
H E A V E M I L R Y T S A N T
Y S R E D O R E E T D A D O O
A E I U E A E N U E I S M C P
T S C D G N T B E N E E A S R
F G H S A U Q S A C P C S R T
O N A P H R D H L H A I N E
K I N C R R K E U A L P A R E
I L A A A A L C I U S N N B
A P J T M V K R H E A K T O E
L M S L E A E C Y S O L I K A
A U A S N A A N A D N I T R N
M D M O M A D R A C I Z B A S

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Aluchya, Asian, Beans, Beets, Bread, Butter, Cardamom, Carrot, Chana, Cheese, Chickpeas, Chilis, Chivda, Chutney, Clove, Corn, Cream, Cumin, Dal Makhani, Dumplings, Garlic, Kilos, Lauki, Leaves, Lime, Malai Kofta, Mustard Seeds, Naan, Okra, Onion, Paneer, Phulka, Potato, Radish, Raita, Rajma, Rice, Roti, Sabzi, Spices, Squash, Swede, Tinda, Tomato

Yesterday's Answer: Confetti

Jo's Jewels Collector's Edition is back by popular demand! Purchase online at www.WonderWordBooks.com or call 1-800-842-6482.

Irving helps Nets charge past Pacers in his season debut



INDIANAPOLIS (AP)—Kyrie Irving scored 22 points and sparked Brooklyn to a big rally in the second half of his season debut, Kevin Durant had 39 and the Nets beat the Indiana Pacers 129-121 on Wednesday night.

Irving is ineligible to play home games because he is not vaccinated as mandated in New York City, and the Nets had decided against allowing him to just play road games for most of the season.

But they changed their mind last month and were glad they did Wednesday, when Irving helped them charge back from a 19-point deficit. The point guard played 32 minutes as Brooklyn snapped a three-game losing streak.

"He looks like himself, not that that's a surprise," Nets coach Steve Nash said.

Durant said it was amazing to see Irving out on floor again.

"He didn't act nervous, he has a nice poker face," Durant said. "He's a quiet guy. He plays with energy and passion."

Irving said he was nervous, adding it was different than any previous debut in his basketball career.

"This meant a little more, taking eight months off and so much uncertainty," he said "I settled down closer to the second half. Whatever the team (needs), I'll do."

Domantas Sabonis had 32 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for the Pacers, who have lost in six in a row. Lance Stephenson, who had two previous stints with the Pacers, scored 30 in his first home game with the Pacers after signing a 10-day contract.

"Just working out two years, waiting for this moment," Stephenson said. "I'm so happy to be here, it's home. It's like playing in front of family."

Stephenson delighted the home crowd by scoring the final 20 points for the Pacers in the first quarter as Indiana took a 37-32 lead. He hit 8 of 9 shots, 4 of 5 3-pointers in that 6-plus minute stretch.

The 20 points were a record for any Pacers player in the first quarter. It was also the most points in the opening quarter for a player coming off the bench.

The Pacers shot 62% to a grab a 73-60 lead at halftime. Irving hit a shot at the third-quarter buzzer to cut Indiana's lead to 101-94. That capped an 8-0 run by the Nets.

Patty Mills sank a 3-pointer to put Brooklyn ahead for good at 107-106 with 7:23 left. Irving followed with two consecutive baskets to push the lead to 111-106 and Indiana never recovered.

"It came down to defense and effort, and second half was night and day to the first," Nash said. "It took us getting in a deep hole before we showed them the respect the game and them the respect they deserved."

Irving agreed that the comeback started on the defensive end.

Brooklyn shot 56% overall while Indiana finished at 49%.

"We kept our composure and made shots when we needed to," said James Harden, who added 18 points. "We got physical and challenged shots."

Nash said the Nets called the first play of the game for Irving, who missed a 19-foot shot.

"It was a welcome back gift," Nash said.

Irving hit 9 of 17 shots and 2 of 4 free throws.

LaMarcus Aldridge, who has said he is still recovering his condition from his COVID-19 bout, scored 13 points in 16 minutes. He had missed the last game after returning to play two games following his COVID-19 bout. DeAndre' Bembry scored 12 points, hitting all five shots, in 20 minutes.

"He didn't deserve not to be in the rotation," Nash said. "We just had to try different things with everyone back."

Malcolm Brogdon, Chris Duarte and Jeremy Lamb have been cleared to play from health and safety protocols but held out for return to competition conditioning. Caris LeVert, Kelan Martin, Isaiah Jackson and Goga Bitadze were sidelined by the COVID-19 protocols. Torrey Craig was out with a right groin injury suffered in Tuesday night's loss at New York.

Mavericks 99, Warriors 82

In Dallas, Luka Doncic scored 26 points and Dallas celebrated before a ceremony to retire Dirk Nowitzki's number by beating cold-shooting Stephen Curry and Golden State.

The Mavericks knew the night belonged to their franchise icon, and that Nowitzki's No. 41 wasn't going to the rafters until after they played the team with the NBA's best record coming in.

Dallas responded with its first four-game winning streak of the season in Doncic's third game back since a career-long, 10-game absence caused by left ankle and knee issues and a positive COVID-19 test. The only concern for the Mavericks was Doncic limping off the floor in the final two minutes and not returning.

Curry was coming off his worst shooting night of the season and wasn't much better, going 5 of 24, including 1



Brooklyn Nets coach Steve Nash reacts with Kyrie Irving during the second half of the team's NBA basketball game against the Indiana Pacers, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022, in Indianapolis.

AP

of 9 from 3-point range, to finish with 14 points.

Andrew Wiggins scored 17 points for Golden State. At 29-8, the Warriors dropped into a tie with the Phoenix Suns for the best record in the NBA.

Hornets 140, Pistons 111

In Charlotte, N.C., Kelly Oubre Jr. hit a career-high nine of Charlotte's franchise-record 24 3-pointers and the Hornets routed Detroit.

Oubre had eight 3-pointers in the fourth quarter, tying an NBA record set by Milwaukee's Michael Redd in 2002. Oubre was 8 of 9 on 3s in the fourth quarter before being subbed out with 4:08 left and the Hornets leading by 35.

Golden State's Klay Thompson holds the league record for 3-pointers in a quarter with nine, that coming in the third quarter of a game in 2015.

Oubre was 9 of 14 from 3-point range and the Hornets shot 57.1% at 24 of 42.

Gordon Hayward and Miles Bridges each had 19 points to help the Hornets beat the Pistons for the 14th straight time. Trey Lyles had 17 points for Detroit.

Spurs 99, Celtics 97

In Boston, Gregg Popovich became the first to coach 2,000 NBA games with the same team, and Dejounte Murray scored 22 points to lead San Antonio past Boston.

Devin Vassell and Derrick White each had 17 points to help the Spurs snap a four-game losing streak.

Jaylen Brown led Boston with 30 points after scoring a career-high 50 in a victory

over Orlando in the Celtics' last game, but had a driving layup roll off the rim just before the buzzer sounded.

Jazz 115, Nuggets 109

In Denver, Bojan Bogdanovic scored a season-high 36 points and Utah beat Denver to stretch its road winning streak to 10 games.

Rudy Gay had 18 points and Donovan Mitchell added 17 for the Jazz.

Nuggets star Nikola Jokic had 26 points, 21 rebounds and 11 assists for his 64th career triple-double. Monte Morris and Will Barton added 20 points apiece.

76ers 116, Magic 106

In Orlando, Fla., Joel Embiid scored 31 points, Tobias Harris added 22 and Philadelphia beat Orlando.

The 76ers, who notched their NBA-best 14th road victory of the season, tied a season high with a fifth straight win overall. They beat Orlando for the second time this season and 10th straight overall.

Seth Curry added 20 points, a season-high 12 assists and seven rebounds, while Furkan Korkmaz scored 15 of his 20 points in the second half.

Cole Anthony led Orlando with 26 points.

Raptors 117, Bucks 111

In Milwaukee, Pascal Siakam scored 33 points, OG Anunoby and Gary Trent Jr. had 22 apiece and Toronto beat short-handed Milwaukee.

Fred VanVleet added 19 points for the Raptors. They improved to 18-17 and overcame Milwaukee's hot-shooting first half and late rally.

Khris Middleton led the Bucks with 25 points.

The defending NBA champs were without coach Mike Budenholzer after he entered the NBA's health and safety protocols. Milwaukee played without NBA Finals MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo, who sat out due to an illness unrelated to COVID-19. Grayson Allen, George Hill and Pat Connaughton also entered protocols on Wednesday.

Rockets 114, Wizards 111

In Washington, Kevin Porter Jr. hit a 3-pointer from the right wing with 0.4 seconds left to lift Houston past Washington.

Porter and Christian Wood returned from one-game suspensions for conduct detrimental to the team. Wood added 22 points and 11 rebounds to help the Rockets snap an eight-game losing streak.

Jalen Green also scored 22 points and Eric Gordon had 19 for Houston.

Bradley Beal led Washington with 27 points. He fouled out with 9:10 to play.

Heat 115, Trail Blazers 109

In Portland, Ore., Max Strus had 25 points and Miami beat Portland to snap a two-game losing streak.

Heat star Jimmy Butler sat out after sprained an ankle Monday night in a loss at Golden State. Miami also overcame the first-half ejection of Kyle Lowry, which left the already short-handed Heat with nine players for the rest of the game.

The teams tussled in the final minute after an altercation

between Portland's Jusuf Nurkic and Miami's Tyler Herro. Both were ejected. Herro finished with 16 point.

Anfernee Simons led Portland with 28 points. Norman Powell added 26.

Timberwolves 98, Thunder 90

In Minneapolis, Karl-Anthony Towns had 17 points and 16 rebounds, while D'Angelo Russell struggled on 3-of-12 shooting in their return to the lineup for Minnesota in a victory over Oklahoma City.

Anthony Edwards scored 22 points for Minnesota, which was finally at full strength for the first time since Edwards and Taurean Prince went into the NBA's health and safety protocols on Dec. 17. Towns had missed six games and Russell sat out five.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 19 points in his return for Oklahoma City after missing a game in the protocols. Josh Giddey, who became the youngest player in NBA history with a triple-double in the Thunder's last game, had 14 points, 15 rebounds and six assists.

Hawks 108, Kings 102

In Sacramento, Calif., Kevin Huerter scored five of his 25 points in the final 38 seconds and short-handed Atlanta held off Sacramento.

Huerter added 11 rebounds, helping the Hawks win for only the third time in nine games. Hawks star Trae Young sat out with a lower back bruise two days after scoring a career-high 56 points in a loss at Portland.

De'Aaron Fox had 30 points and six assists for Sacramento.

Antonio Brown says he was forced to play injured by Bucs



TAMPA, Fla.

(AP)—Antonio Brown says he didn't quit on the Tampa Bay Buccaneers dur-

ing the middle of a game, but rather he was cut after refusing to play through an ankle injury that sidelined him for several weeks this season.

The oft-troubled wide receiver, who took off his jersey, shoulder pads and undershirt before walking off the sideline during a game Sunday against the New York Jets, said in a statement released by his attorney that he was pressured to play and coach Bruce Arians fired him when the player told the coach he was not able to re-enter the game because of his ankle.

While not specifying which ankle was hurt, Brown—through a statement released by his attorney Wednesday—said an MRI performed Monday showed broken bone fragments, a ligament tear and cartilage loss “which are beyond painful. You can see the bone bulging from the outside.”

Arians said the day after the game that Brown did not claim he was injured when he refused to continue playing against the Jets. The coach declined to discuss specifics of the conversation on the sideline and said he had “no clue” why the receiver reacted by storming off the field, tossing some of his gear into the stands and waving to fans at MetLife Stadium.



Tampa Bay Buccaneers wide receiver Antonio Brown (81) gestures to the crowd as he leaves the field while his team's offense is on the field against the New York Jets during the third quarter of an NFL football game Sunday, Jan. 2, 2022, in East Rutherford, N.J. (AP)

Brown told a different story in his statement.

“Because of my commitment to the game, I relented to pressure directly from my coach to play injured,” he said. “Despite the pain, I suited up, the staff injected me with what I now know was a powerful and sometimes dangerous painkiller that the NFLPA has warned against using, and I gave it my all for the team. I

played until it was clear that I could not use my ankle to safely perform my playing responsibilities.

“On top of that, the pain was extreme. I took a seat on the sideline and my coach came up to me, very upset, and shouted, ‘What’s wrong with you? What’s wrong with you?’ I told him, ‘It’s my ankle.’ But he knew that. It was well documented and we had

discussed it.

“He then ordered me to get on the field. I said, ‘Coach, I can’t.’ He didn’t call for medical attention. Instead, he shouted at me, ‘YOU’RE DONE!’ while he ran his finger across his throat. Coach was telling me that if I didn’t play hurt, then I was done with the Bucs.”

Although Arians said after the game that Brown was no

longer a part of the reigning Super Bowl champions, the 33-year-old receiver who’s caught a pass in his last 144 games remained on the roster Wednesday.

Wednesday’s injury report noted Brown’s absence from practice was “not injury related—personal.”

Asked about the team not making an official transaction in regard to Brown, who did

not accompany the team back to Tampa following Sunday’s game, Arians replied: “It’s a management decision on what is happening right now.”

On whether it was simply a matter of how Brown will be removed from the team, not if, Arians said: “Right.”

The team did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Brown’s statement Wednesday night.

The receiver alleged a coverup.

“I didn’t quit. I was cut. I didn’t walk away from my brothers. I was thrown out,” Brown’s statement read.

“Being fired on the sideline for having a painful injury was bad enough. Then came their ‘spin.’ Coach denied on national television that he knew about my ankle. That’s 100% inaccurate,” the receiver added. “Not only did he know I missed several games with the injury, he and I exchanged texts days before the game where he clearly acknowledged my injury.”

Brown injured his ankle during a victory at Philadelphia in mid-October. He returned to the lineup against Carolina on Dec. 26, after serving a three-game suspension for misrepresenting his COVID-19 vaccination status.

The former Steelers, Raiders and Patriots receiver had 10 catches for 101 yards against the Panthers. He three receptions for 26 yards against the Jets after missing two practices last week due to the ankle injury.

By ROB MAADDI
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER

NFL teams could lose draft pick for interview violations

The NFL has issued a warning to teams that they could lose a draft pick and face significant fines if club representatives conduct themselves unprofessionally in interviews with draft prospects.

In a memo obtained by the AP that was sent to clubs on Wednesday, the league said a team would forfeit a draft pick between the first and fourth round and be fined a minimum of \$150,000 if it’s determined a club representative displayed conduct that is “disrespectful, inappropriate, or unprofessional” during an interview. Fines and/or suspensions of individual club employees also could be imposed, according to the memo.

“We aim for dignity, respect and professionalism,” league executive Troy Vincent told the AP. “It’s that simple.”

The league also plans to eliminate the Wonderlic test for prospective players, and it is revising some of its scouting combine drills to better simulate game-related movement. Wide receivers and tight

ends will run crossing routes instead of wheel routes, and running backs will run option routes instead of corner and post-corner routes.

Some drills for offensive linemen and defensive players also were revised to better assess in-game player movements.

The league reminds teams annually ahead of the combine that federal and state laws as well as the collective bargaining agreement between the league and the NFL Players Association prohibits discrimination based on various factors, including race, color, disabilities, religion, sexual orientation, national origin and marital status, and questions on these subjects are off limits. This is the first time the NFL has threatened specific accountability measures if draft prospects are asked about any of these subjects.

“All clubs should ensure that prospective draft picks are afforded a respectful and professional NFL environment—one that is consistent with state

and federal law and our shared commitment to respect, diversity and inclusion,” the memo states. “The same is true of free agents whom your club may consider signing. It is also important for your club to reinforce to prospective players the value your club places on character and the standards of conduct expected of everyone associated with the NFL.”

The NFL has been seeking ways to improve the professional and medical experience for draft prospects at the combine.

Prospects are encouraged to report offensive conduct without retaliation.

Over the past several years, there have been occasional reports of inappropriate questions being asked of draft prospects.

In 2010, then-Miami Dolphins general manager Jeff Ireland apologized to Dallas Cowboys first-round draft pick Dez Bryant for asking during a pre-draft visit whether his mother was a prostitute.

In 2016, then-Atlanta Falcons coach Dan Quinn apolo-

gized to Eli Apple because one of his coaches asked the cornerback his sexual preference.

In 2018, former LSU running back Derrius Guice said one team at the combine asked about his sexuality and another inquired if his mother was a prostitute.

Former NFL tight end Benjamin Watson, who played 16 seasons between 2004-20, compared the interview process to an interrogation.

“I can remember sitting in a dark room with a huge spotlight,” Watson told the AP last year. “There’s a seat there like you’re being interrogated for a crime and all the front-office staff is in the back in the shadows and you can’t see them. The guy grabbed my wrist and he’s like: ‘I can feel your pulse, so I know if you’re lying to me. Have you ever smoked marijuana?’ I said: ‘No.’ I really hadn’t. I’ve never smoked. He said: ‘I think you’re lying. I can feel your pulse. Are you lying to us?’ I said: ‘No, I’m not.’

“So for a minute, I thought I

actually did smoke marijuana and maybe I need to confess to a crime that I didn’t commit. But these sorts of tactics that are happening at the combine and that are not being monitored definitely need to be done away with.”

The league has now taken strong steps to ensure draft prospects aren’t embarrassed or offended during interviews and medical evaluations.

“These student-athletes should be celebrated, not humiliated,” said Vincent, the league’s executive vice president of football operations and a former five-time Pro Bowl cornerback.

From a medical standpoint, prospects will have one orthopedic examination onsite as opposed to multiple ones in the past. Also, medical interviews will be conducted virtually before the combine.

The combine will be held in Indianapolis again this year, but it could be moving to a new city for 2023-24. Indianapolis, Dallas and Los Angeles are bidding for the right to host the

combine the next two years.

Peter O’Reilly, the NFL’s executive vice president of club business and events, said a decision on the next host city is expected in May.

“Our fan base is so amazing and interest in the combine gets greater and greater every year,” O’Reilly said. “That ties to interest in the draft so the opportunity to find ways to elevate this whole post-Super Bowl window and lead into the next year is high in our mind.”

Expanding media coverage with more prime-time workouts and enhancing the fan experience are among the league’s goals.

“At its core, the combine is and always will be a football evaluation event and medical evaluation event for the clubs, but there is such intense fan interest that we’re spending a lot of time thinking about the evolution of that,” O’Reilly said. “It’s become a significant media event. ... As we head into Indy this year and then beyond, we’ll continue to find ways to make it more accessible to fans given the massive interest in the intersection of college and the NFL at its best.”

Novak Djokovic denied entry to Australia, has visa canceled



Serbia's Novak Djokovic holds the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup after defeating Russia's Daniil Medvedev in the men's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Sunday, Feb. 21, 2021. AP

MICHAH

From Page 24

Rugby Club and quickly fell in love. I found the game so similar to soccer in so many ways. The constant stream of action and the beautiful intricacy of the tactics. Soccer prepared me so well to be successful in rugby and with my teammates' help and my dedication to learning everything I could about the game I was able to succeed."

Griffin added he'd love to finish his first season playing in the MLR with nothing less than a championship.

"My goal is to do all that I can to make sure our captain Thretton Palamo is lifting the MLR championship trophy on June 25."

Asked who he wants to

thank for his achievements in rugby, Griffin said all his success is due to his teammates, friends, family, and partner Camille.

"They have supported me and my dreams of making it to this level. They did everything possible to allow me to focus on growing my game and I couldn't have done it without them."

Griffin may now be a professional rugby player, but he vows that he'll continue to suit up for the Blue Ayuyus if ever his number is called.

"I'm hoping to return to play again this summer with the men's national team once the MLR season concludes. I also miss my friends and teammates dearly. In fact, the sunset BBQs on Pau Pau I think about once a day," he said.

TRAC

From Page 24

He added that the CNMI used to host triathlon, biking, basketball, and other sports competitions with their neighbors from the south and the planned Marianas Cup would be a great idea to revive the tradition.

"They will always be looking forward for something to compete in. They will really be motivated to train because they have something like the Marianas Cup to look forward to. Athletes take a long time to improve if there's no motivation like upcoming competitions. This is so far one of the best proposals from NMSA and most athletes are for sure looking forward to this event," said Sitchon.

Duathlon tomorrow

TRAC will host its first event of the 2022 with the 6th Saipan Duathlon set for tomorrow in Marpi.

The 5-kilometer run, 20-km bike, and 2.5-km run will start at Banzai Cliff with a 5:30am opening of the transition site and a 6:15am gun start (depending on the sunrise).

BRISBANE, Australia (AP)—Novak Djokovic's chance to play for a 10th Australian Open title was thrown into limbo Thursday when the country denied him entry and canceled his visa because he failed to meet the requirements for an exemption to COVID-19 vaccination rules.

The top-ranked Djokovic announced on social media Tuesday that he had "exemption permission" and he landed in Australia late Wednesday with a medical exemption from the Victoria state government that was expected to shield him from the strict vaccination regulations in place for this year's first major tennis tournament.

But national border authorities didn't accept the exemption, with the Australian Border Force issuing a statement

saying Djokovic failed to meet entry requirements.

"The rule is very clear," Prime Minister Scott Morrison told a news conference. "You need to have a medical exemption. He didn't have a valid medical exemption. We make the call at the border, and that's where it's enforced."

Health Minister Greg Hunt said the visa cancellation followed a review of Djokovic's medical exemption by border officials who looked "at the integrity and the evidence behind it."

He said Djokovic was free to appeal the decision, "but if a visa is canceled, somebody will have to leave the country."

The president of Djokovic's native Serbia blasted the "harassment" of the star, who was detained overnight at Melbourne Tullamarine Airport.

The 20-time major winner had to wait more than eight hours at the airport to find out if he would be allowed into the country. He was later moved to a secure hotel near downtown Melbourne which is controlled by immigration officials.

The Australian Broadcasting Corp. and other local media reported that action had been launched in the Federal Court against the cancellation of Djokovic's visa.

Quarantine-free access wouldn't have been an issue if Djokovic had been able to prove he was fully vaccinated for the coronavirus. Instead he applied for a medical exemption, a route that only became an option in recent months after Victoria state backed away from a full no-

vaccination, no-play policy.

Questions have been raised about the approval of the exemption.

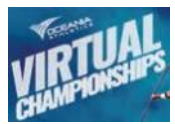
The Sydney Morning Herald published letters sent late last year from the Department of Health and Health Minister Greg Hunt to Tennis Australia which indicated that Djokovic, at that time, didn't meet the standard for quarantine-free entry.

Responding to questions about confusion over the differing state and federal requirements, Morrison said it was up to individual travelers to have correct documentation on arrival.

The prime minister rejected the suggestion that Djokovic was being singled out, but he acknowledged that other players may be in Australia on the same type of medical exemption.

Traven, Reylyn return to competition

By **MARK RABAGO**
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



Traven Quitugua and Reylyn Sapong reintroduced themselves to the athletics community by winning the century dash of the local Oceania Virtual Championships held last Dec. 20 at the Oleai track and field.

Quitugua topped the men's 100m in a time of 11.56 to beat a five-man field that also included Leowell Cristobal (11.95), Theo Rodgers (12.18), Orrin Pharmin (12.34), and Michael Rodgers (12.8).

"I didn't really feel anything when I won the event. I used to be in the national team for track and I did the 100m and 200m events and I'm now trying to get back to training," said Quitugua.

He is dedicating his 100m victory to no one else but himself.

"Nobody but myself to get better. But yeah I was a national team member before. Now that I'm working I'm trying to get back again."

Sapong, for her part, returned to her beloved sport

without seemingly skipping a beat by winning the women's 100m in 13.26. She was followed by the only other competitor in the event, Maria Quitugua (15.09).

"It's been nine years since my last competition. The virtual meet was exciting but I'm looking forward to more in-person events," said Sapong.

The Asia Pacific Group of Raymond James in Guam staff had been delving on weightlifting before deciding to return to her first love during the virtual meet.

"I've been focused on weightlifting for the last year but recently decided to run again due to an injury. During the pandemic I found myself more motivated to train."

Taking part in the Dec. 20 meet apparently sparked something inside Sapong as she is now contemplating trying out for this year's Pacific Mini Games that the CNMI will be hosting for the first time ever.

"I joined the event for fun and had no intentions to compete in the Mini Games. That's changed and now I'd like to compete with my sister, Zarinae Sapong, the



Quitugua



Sapong

CNMI's top sprinter."

Last October, Oceania Athletics announced it will be conducting its regional championships online through the 2021 Oceania Athletics Virtual Championships.

"With the world, and especially the Pacific feeling the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic, it has meant that it is now, over two years, since we have been able to gather as an Oceania Athletics family in person," said Oceania Athletics.

It said the 2021 Oceania Athletics Virtual Championships would allow athletes of all ages and abilities to compete, albeit virtually, for medals and to be crowned Oceania Virtual Champion.

The 2021 Oceania Athletics Virtual Championships was held in partnership with Oceania Masters Athletics Association and saw champions crowned and medals awarded across multiple age groups, from under 14 to 80 years of age.

NMVA

From Page 24

Committee CEO Ben Babauta.

Tolentino thanked Badminton Oceania for initiating communications with the BWF for the inclusion of the Mini Games in the loaded calendar. The NMBA president added that this will give the islands' players the platform to showcase their skills and the NMI the opportunity to show its ability to host a high-level competition. This is the

first time that an NMI-hosted event is included in the BWF calendar. Matches in the Mini Games will take place at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium.

The Northern Marianas Pacific Mini Games 2022 is lined up along with the Indonesia Open (June 14 to 19), Iberdrola Spanish International (June 15 to 18), German International (June 15 to 18), and Croatia Valamar Junior Open (June 16 to 29). There are 11 other competitions that the BWF has scheduled for

June and they will be held in Latvia, Denmark, Lithuania, France, China, Bulgaria, Malaysia, and Russia.

Besides the national championships of the different BWF-member countries, the federation's annual calendar highlights events included in the World Tour, Future Series both for adults and junior players, and Grand Prix. These top competitions provide ranking points and prize money to players from five confederations—Badminton Africa,

Badminton Asia, Badminton Europe, Badminton Oceania, and Badminton Pan-Am. The NMI is an associate member of BWF and full member of Badminton Oceania.

Meanwhile, Cook Islands, Guam, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tahiti, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Wallis & Futuna are the other countries competing in this year's Pacific Mini Games. The final names and numbers of competitors will be determined in May. (PR)



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Michah Griffin to suit up for pro rugby team



Michah Griffin, seen here suiting up for Old Glory's U23 academy, will see action for Old Glory's professional team in this upcoming season of Major League Rugby. **CONTRIBUTED PHOTO**

By **MARK RABAGO**
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Former CNMI national football player Michah Griffin has turned professional albeit for a different sport after making it to the Old Glory DC roster of Major League Rugby.

"I've joined Old Glory DC which is a professional team in Major League Rugby. This will be Old Glory's third season in the league as rugby grows as the fastest-growing team sport in the States," he said in a social media message to *Saipan Tribune*.

Griffin, who is the son of former CNMI women's national football team player Elisa Long and the brother of CNMI women's national football player Gianna Griffin, had to earn his



spurs to be elevated to Old Glory DC's professional team.

"I was selected to join Old Glory's U23 academy as a development player and based on my performance with them I was brought on to the first team for the upcoming season this February."

The 24-year-old software developer for a financial services company suited up for the Blue Ayuyus in the first round of the 2016 East Asian Football Feder-

ation's East Asian Cup in 2016.

That team was coached by Kiyoshi Sekiguchi and among Griffin's teammates were Jehn Joyner, Enrico Del Rosario, Hunter Jewell, Sunjoon Tenorio, and Chris Aninzo.

Griffin said he still has some goosebumps when he remembers donning the CNMI's colors during that tournament.

"My very first time pulling on the kit and hearing the anthem was a special moment I will never forget, but slotting my first international goal against Macau from the penalty spot was pure joy! I will always treasure it," he said.

The former Saipan International School student said he shifted to rugby when he went to college at Georgetown University.

"I learned rugby from my classmates and teammates at the Georgetown University **See MICHAH on Page 23**

Mini Games badminton listed in BWF calendar



The badminton competition in the Northern Marianas Pacific Mini Games 2022 has been included in the calendar of events of the Badminton World Federation.

The 2022 BWF Calendar of Events, which will start with the Yonex-Sunrise India Open in New Delhi next week, will feature 127 competitions spread across the globe and cover 50 weeks of badminton action. The Northern Marianas Pacific Mini Games 2022, which will run from June 17 to 25 with the badminton competition scheduled from June 20 to 25, is one of the five events slated in Week 24.

"The Badminton World Federation (BWF) has added the Games to their international calendar, which is good news," Badminton Oceania chief executive officer and general secretary Julie Carrel said in an email to Northern Marianas Badminton Association president Merlie Tolentino and Pacific Mini Games Organizing **See MINI on Page 23**



A junior player returns a shot to his opponent during the TakeCare Badminton Open held in October last year at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium, which will be the venue for the badminton competition of the Northern Marianas Pacific Mini Games 2022 in June. The Mini Games has been included in the calendar of events of the Badminton World Federation. **CONTRIBUTED PHOTO**

TRAC looks forward to Marianas Cup

By **MARK RABAGO**
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Triathlon Association of the CNMI fully supports the call for the establishment of an annual CNMI-Guam competition for all sports patterned after the soccer federation's Marianas Cup.

TRAC president Manny Sitchon said the Northern Marianas Sports Association will be hitting two birds with one stone with the Marianas Cup format.

"This is really a good program for sporting events. We will not only improve our relationship with our counterparts in Guam, but we will also keep our athletes motivated because the Marianas Cup will be a yearly thing."

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Triathlon Association of the CNMI president Manny Sitchon starts the bike portion of the Mini Games triathlon tryout last Dec. 4 at Paupau Beach. **MARK RABAGO**